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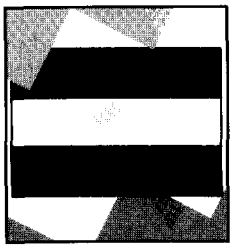

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CORRESPONDENCE

Ties that bind

To the editors:

Your Notebook item "Carter Xiaoping" (May 20) grossly distorts my position regarding human rights in China.

During my recent visit to Beijing, in a speech to the students and faculty of China's College of Foreign Affairs, I publicly called for the leaders of China to declare a universal amnesty for all those who were involved in the Tiananmen Square disaster of June 1989, and to commute the sentences of those already tried and convicted. Subsequently, I pursued this same theme even more forcefully during my personal meetings with Premier Li Peng, Party Chairman Ziang Zemin, the foreign minister, and others. I made it clear to them that the extension of most-favored-nation trade status by the U.S. government would likely be predicated on their taking such action. In addition, I requested assurances that students now studying overseas be guaranteed the right to return to their home country without facing the prospect of being arrested or harassed because of non-violent actions criticizing government policies. I also asked that these students be permitted to return to their studies in foreign countries following such home visits.

This latter assurance was given, and has been relayed to human rights and Chinese student groups. I have been informed that two of the detainees have been released, labor leader Han Dongfang and legal scholar Li Jinjin, whom I named in my requests.

Continuing political and commercial relations between our two countries are very valuable, both in sustaining peace and prosperity in Asia and in helping to emphasize the necessity to protect human rights. I hope that my request for a total amnesty for the non-violent demonstrators will be honored, and that U.S. government officials will make every effort to persuade the Chinese leaders to take this action, using the issues of trade, including most-favored-nation status, in the most effective way.

JIMMY CARTER
Atlanta, Georgia

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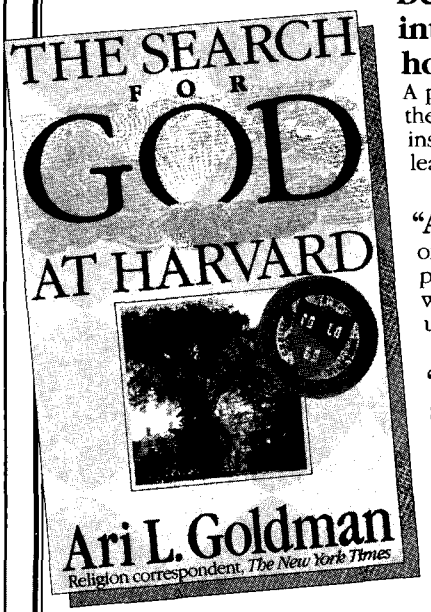

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Rip-off

To the editors:

In his review of Paul West's novel *The Women of Whitechapel and Jack the Ripper* ("London Psycho," May 6), Sven Birkerts replays large elements of the plot, mentioning characters such as Prince Eddy, Annie Crook, Sir William Gull, and Walter Sickert. Mr. Birkerts says that "the greatest of the liberties he [West] has taken is his casting of the painter Walter Sickert . . . in a central role—indeed, implicating him in the actual [Jack the Ripper] murders. I have found no basis for this in accounts of Sickert's life."

Well, maybe not. But this whole story, including Mr. Sickert's participation in the murders, was told by Stephen Knight in *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* (London: Harrap, 1976) as if it were historical fact. The liberties were taken by Mr. Knight, not Mr. West. Perhaps Mr. West, in his book, acknowledges his debt to Mr. Knight. Mr. Birkerts certainly doesn't mention it.

WILLIAM ADDAMS REITWIESNER
Silver Spring, Maryland

To the editors:

Sven Birkerts notes in passing the names of several prolific writers but, unaccountably, omits the legendary Simenon (who is said to have written hundreds of novels under pseudonyms as well as his own name) and Isaac Asimov (as of April 1991, the author of 451 books). Balzac, Trollope, Henry James, and even D. H. Lawrence, who died young, were all prolific by contemporary standards.

Mr. Birkerts speaks of "graphomania" in this context (a concept half-seriously developed by Milan Kundera in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*), but a more likely explanation is the pressure of the imagination seeking to express itself.

JOYCE CAROL OATES
Princeton, New Jersey

Cuomo the pragmatist

To the editors:

There are specific public roles that are within a governor's purview and others over which he has marginal influence. In "Broken Record" (May 6), Morton Kondracke provides a spectacular list of Mario Cuomo's accomplishments in the first category, including infrastructure improvement, prison construction, and initiatives on ethics and race relations, but gives them short shrift. He then dwells at length on the governor's shortcomings in the second and judges him harshly.

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Mr. Kondracke cites, for example, two areas as Governor Cuomo "deficiencies" that a better grasp of New York state government and politics would debunk: education and fiscal management. New York is the only state that has removed the governor from management of the education system. Policy and regulation are set by a Board of Regents, which the legislature appoints. A commissioner, appointed by and solely responsible to the board, promulgates that policy. Local autonomous boards manage the delivery system. The governor's role is fiscal, but even that involves a distribution of resources that is set by legislative formula and heavily weighted toward suburban and upstate districts. Even so, Governor Cuomo has significantly increased aid to all levels of education, won support for initiatives rewarding excellence in teaching, and created the Liberty Scholarships program, which is a national model.

The fiscal management issue is more confounding. Governors propose budgets but legislatures enact them. The fight every year in the legislature is over how much to increase the governor's budget. For years an informal coalition of conservative upstate representatives and New York City liberals has argued that the governor's revenue projections were low and every year, bar none, his budgets have been increased. A simplistic response is that the governor can veto. Ask Hugh Carey. He did and was overridden, rendering him frustrated and ineffectual.

What hurts Mario Cuomo is that he speaks to the ideal and does it so well that it clouds overall assessments of his stewardship. He actually is a hard-headed pragmatist who believes in social justice and the duty of government to ensure it. He also understands the limits of budgets. Within the highly charged political atmosphere of this state, Mr. Cuomo's "incrementalist" approach is the only kind that ensures lasting change.

SANDY FRUCHER
FLORENCE FRUCHER
New York, New York

The writers are, respectively, former president of the Battery Park City Authority and former director of the New York City Office of Health Systems Management.

To the editors:

In his article on Governor Cuomo, Morton Kondracke ignores that the assembly and the senate in New York state have utterly failed in helping to govern the state. I am a registered Republican and I have nothing good to say about the Republican Party in this state. They have completely let us down in light of Mario Cuomo's failed governorship, particularly looking at the last election. It's very difficult to run a two-party system of government when one of the parties chooses actively not to join in on the festivities.

TOM DIGAETANO
Rochester, New York
(Via 900 number)

Aborting logic

To the editors:

Governor Cuomo's position on abortion strikes a familiar historical chord. He has said that as a Catholic, he is personally opposed to abortion. Yet he has the obligation as governor of a multicultural, multireligious state not to impose his personal and religious beliefs on the whole people.

The logic of this position is identical to the pre-presidential thinking of Abraham Lincoln on the subject of slavery. Mr. Lincoln's personal opposition to slavery was, and is, well known. Yet he did not believe that he could, as president, constitutionally abolish slavery where it already existed. Lincoln, like Cuomo, believed that he could not impose his personal beliefs on the nation. (The Emancipation Proclamation was a military act in wartime by the Commander in Chief.)

A parallel can also be seen between the press of 1858 and today's Andrew Sullivan ("Dead End," May 6). His article boils over with the abusive adjectives that ever attended our sixteenth president from the intellectual elite of his day. Had Mr. Sullivan's pen been loosed upon the nineteenth century the weight of his misspent ink would have been added to the burden of Mr. Lincoln and any other public figure whose opinions surpasseth Mr. Sullivan's understanding.

GLENN BARNETT
Los Angeles, California

No free ride

To the editors:

In "Stop It Hertz" (April 22) Jonathan Rauch cites an off-airport car rental franchisee who was allegedly driven out of business by an airport's user fee. This is contrary to the experience at many airports, where car rental companies prosper and profit despite paying user fees.

Of course these companies would rather avoid fees, and garner greater profits and a competitive edge. But all businesses that directly profit from the airport and contribute to its congestion should pay their fair share.

GEORGE P. HOWARD
Washington, D.C.

The writer is president of Airport Operators Council International.

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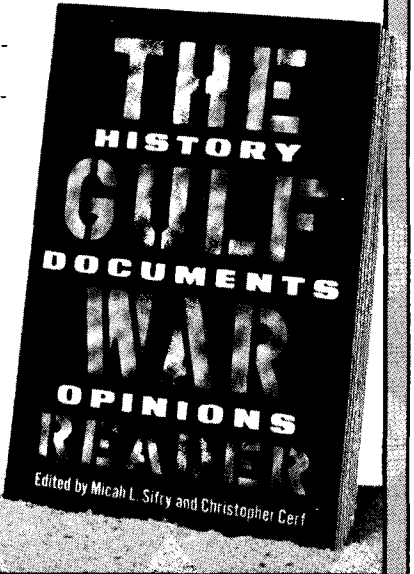
Contributors include: Noam Chomsky, Walter Cronkite, Theodore Draper, Elizabeth Drew, Barbara Ehrenreich, Thomas L. Friedman, David Halberstam, Christopher Hitchens, Michael Kinsley, Lewis H. Lapham, Bernard Lewis, Judith Miller, Edward W. Said, Robert Scheer, Daniel Yergin.



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FROM WASHINGTON

Cocktails for two

Although I have never been pregnant, I know what it's like to want a drink at the end of the day. And I can't imagine that lugging around the extra weight would make me want that drink any less. Yet it has been official U.S. government policy since 1981 that "women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects." Total abstinence. As of November 1989, this warning has been required on every bottle of beer, wine, and hard liquor sold in the United States. (The pregnancy warning gets pride of place, ahead of a caution against drunk driving.) In a celebrated incident in March, a nine-months-pregnant woman ordered a strawberry daiquiri in a Seattle restaurant and was handed the warning label from a beer bottle instead. In April New York joined nine other states in requiring a warning posted in every restaurant and bar.

An official government pamphlet for pregnant women says all alcohol "should be avoided . . . even on infrequent occasions," and recommends instead meditation, "pounding a pillow," or "writing out your feelings." I have chosen the last course. My feeling is that this campaign is totally out of hand.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), first identified in 1973, is an undisputed risk of heavy drinking while pregnant. The effects are similar to those now familiar in crack babies. But it does not follow that light drinking—say, one drink a day—does any harm. According to the leading book on the subject, *Alcohol and the Fetus* by Henry Rosett and Lyn Weiner (Oxford University Press, 1984), "The recommendation that all women should abstain from drinking during pregnancy is not based on scientific evidence, since no risks have been observed from consumption of small quantities."

Dr. Weiner, director of the Fetal Alcohol Education Program at Boston University, says that nothing has happened since 1984 to temper that conclusion. The emphasis on getting the vast majority of light drinkers to go cold turkey, she says, has distracted from efforts to reach heavy drinkers and alcoholics. "Drinking by pregnant women is down, but FAS is not."

Dr. Weiner directed me to the preliminary report of a study by Dr. Robert Sokol, director of the federally funded National Fetal Alcohol Research Center in Detroit, suggesting that there is a threshold of about 1.6 ounces of alcohol a day—that's more than three drinks—before any of sixteen FAS traits (low birthweight, smaller head circumference, etc.) begin to show up. It may seem logical that if six drinks a day are very bad for baby, one drink a day might be sort of bad, but there's no evidence that it works that way. And why should it? It doesn't work that way for adults. Six drinks a day are bad for anybody, whereas one drink isn't.

Warring studies are impossible for the lay person to evaluate, but there doesn't seem to be much ammo on the other side. A fat and atrociously written volume called *Alcohol and Health*, a special report to Congress from the secretary of health and human services (January 1990), has a section labeled "Effects of Lower Levels of Alcohol Drinking During Pregnancy." Yet most of it just repeats the findings about heavy drinking. It cites one study reporting negative effects from "moderate" drinking—defined as two to six drinks a day. Not a word about harmful effects from truly moderate drinking. Nevertheless, HHS concludes that "it is not possible to identify a particular level of social or moderate drinking during pregnancy that will not confer some degree of risk to the unborn child."

The boldest government claim I could find of actual harm from light drinking was in a 1990 HHS booklet for health care professionals: "Even babies whose mothers consume only one drink a day during the first three months of pregnancy have more erratic sleeping patterns. . . ." And for this, every bottle of booze orders all pregnant women not to drink at all? Dr. Weiner says that studies showing even such mild effects from light drinking are suspect because they take mothers' words about how much they drank, and because an average of one or two drinks a day can include getting plastered every Saturday night.

A logical corollary to the ban on drinking while pregnant is that women shouldn't drink at times when they might be pregnant but don't yet know. That covers a large chunk of a woman's life. Some extremists make this recommendation, but the party line is not so bold. In fact, government pamphlets go out of their way to reassure women that no harm has been done by casual drinking before they discovered they were pregnant, provided they stop right away. This is tactful, but it makes a mockery of the absolutist case.

The case for abstinence is not based on evidence. It is based on the logic of better safe than sorry. As a doctor put it in the 1988 Senate hearings that led to the warning labels: "No study has of yet been done to suggest . . . that a safe amount of alcohol exists for all pregnant women." No such study will ever exist, of course, since it requires proving a negative. Some pregnant women (alcoholics, those with medical problems) clearly shouldn't drink. The question is whether most women need to abstain because the risk can never be disproven completely.

It is tempting, especially for an expectant mother, to say that any risk, however small or theoretical, is too great. But that is absurd. As Rosett and Weiner put it, "The pregnant woman is confronted with many ordinary activities in her life which pose a small but identifiable risk," such as "driving an automobile and breathing city air." These risks, true, are harder to avoid, but complete avoidance of one risk usually creates others. Rosett and Weiner note that stress from "an overly restricted lifestyle" and from worrying about theoretical harms can itself "cause neuro-endocrine changes" that are damaging to the fetus.

Everything about light drinking during pregnancy makes it the kind of theoretical risk that is unlikely to be evaluated sensibly. Doctors are innately cautious and made more so by lawyers hovering overhead with malpractice suits. Both these "syndromes" (to use the fashionable term) are aggravated in the field of obstetrics, where emotions run high and where there is a built-in failure rate (birth defects) of about 7 percent. Women who suffer these unavoidable tragedies are needlessly wracked with guilt—or persecuted by their husbands—over a few drinks they might have had over the course of nine months.

Above all, judgment is clouded by the presence of alcohol. This is a double disadvantage to clear social policy thinking. First, any use of alcohol is associated, however irrationally, with its abuse: alcoholism and drunk driving. Second, the benefit side of the cost-benefit calculus is primarily mere pleasure. Despite our alleged national commitment to "the pursuit of happiness," we are far more suspicious than other nations of any shortcuts.

If the evidence about risk to pregnant women from drinking milk were the same as the evidence of risk from light drinking—which it just about is—there isn't a chance in the world that every carton of milk would carry a government warning. But now, when little Johnny brings home his first B- on a math test, every mother in America will worry that it was that cool Budweiser on a hot afternoon in her seventh month. It will drive some of them to serious drink.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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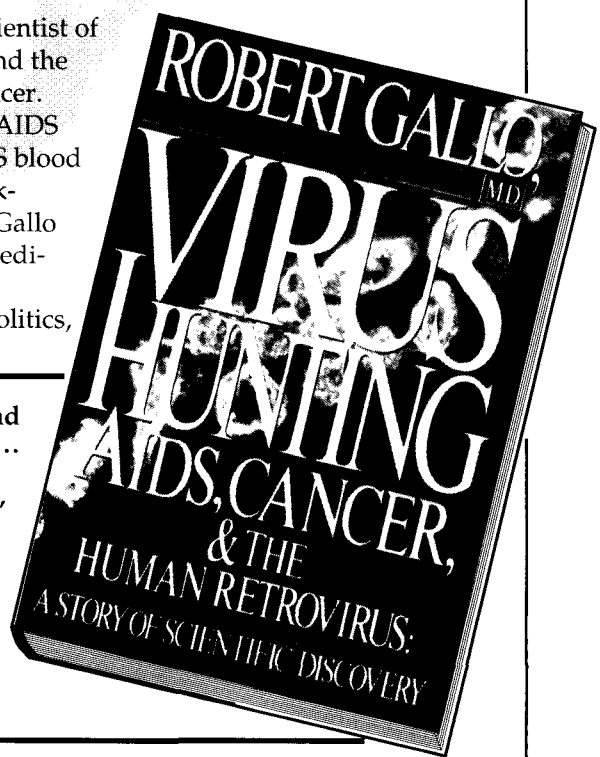

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JUNE 3, 1991

TRAGIC RELIEF

On May 9, during a meeting with the secretary general of the United Nations on the Kurdish refugee crisis, President Bush remarked to his aides that the United States ought to do more to help the victims of the cyclone in Bangladesh. Two days later a seven-ship U.S. amphibious task force, including a helicopter carrier and 4,200 Marines, was diverted from its homeward journey from the Persian Gulf to help lift food and other supplies to the ravaged Bangladeshis. Here at last is a case of sending in the Marines that not even the mildest dove could object to.

The president's gesture was a welcome one. Still, the ships did not arrive until May 14, two weeks after the cyclone had hit—by which time hundreds of thousands of destitute survivors were in imminent danger of death from starvation, disease, and lack of fresh water. The delay in providing aid—and the fact that it had to be provided by the American military, fortuitously in the neighborhood—point up the inadequacy of international preparations for such disasters. Countries prone to earthquake, flood, and famine need help in preparing disaster plans ahead of time. (Bangladesh had next to none.) The United States needs a larger disaster relief budget than its current $90 million per year to make available to the strapped private voluntary agencies that actually do most of the world's relief work. The U.N. needs standby plans to ensure that supplies, personnel, and transport are on call when disasters strike. And the world needs to begin thinking about how to compel governments (like Iraq's, Ethiopia's, and the Sudan's) to allow outside aid to their populations when they refuse to acknowledge that a disaster has occurred, or even try to use hardship as a weapon.

Bangladesh, though grateful for outside aid, is a hard case. And this has been a hard year. The cyclone was especially savage, striking an especially vulnerable area. The country's democratic government was too new, too inexperienced, and too poor to do more than warn coastal peasants to move inland. And private relief organizations are especially short of money this year because the disaster in Bangladesh followed the refugee crisis in Iraq, the ongoing famines and civil wars in the Horn of Africa, a cholera epidemic in Peru, and earthquakes in Costa Rica and the Soviet Union. The cascade of suffering creates what one relief official calls disaster fatigue. Instead of vowing to contribute money when the frightful television pictures come on, people just switch numbly to another channel.

But the special horror of Bangladesh's plight simply underscores the case for better international planning—a case made anew every time some unusually awful calamity is made worse by delay and lack of organization. The same complaints about the ineffectiveness of the United Nations Disaster Relief Office that are being made this year were made six years ago after Mexico City's devastating earthquake. The UNDRO, headquartered in Geneva, cannot adequately coordinate the activities of the several U.N. agencies involved in relief, let alone those of 170 nations and hundreds of private organizations. "At its best, it's a switching point for fax messages," says one congressional expert.

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"At its worst, it's a black hole." The UNDRO's failure, in turn, is a failure of the members of the U.N., which never want to grant the kind of authority to an international agency that would let it command resources and personnel quickly in a time of crisis.

But the end of the cold war has created the possibility that the U.N. might begin at last to redeem some of its promise. When a poor country hit by a natural disaster is willing to accept outside assistance, there should be no excuse for the U.N. to act other than swiftly and effectively. Instead, with each disaster a new ad hoc U.N. relief team is appointed to assess damage and arrange with the local government to marshal aid. "It's the Kleenex method of organization," says an American official. "When the crisis is over, the setup gets thrown away."

What the U.N. needs is a permanent undersecretary general, based in New York, who is in charge of disaster relief—who can help poor countries draw up their own plans and can prepare international relief plans for instant implementation when disaster occurs. Private organizations would continue to be the U.N.'s principal "army" for disaster relief—they are far more efficient and experienced in these matters than military forces, and more welcome. But for a mercy brigade, as for a combat brigade, assignments need to be made in advance for rapid deployment and logistics. In some cases, as with Bangladesh, the U.N. should be able to call upon member states' military forces to furnish transport. That, too, should be planned ahead of time. However problematic the U.N. remains politically, it ought to be able to function on a humanitarian level. Indeed, disaster relief is as minimalist a test of the organization's viability as can be imagined.

When disaster strikes and an emergency is declared, an American ambassador has only $25,000 in discretionary funds to promise a local government, a ridiculously small sum. On the first day after the Bangladesh disaster, the United States was able to pledge only $100,000 to private relief groups. Britain pledged $2.2 million. The current U.S. total is now up to about $6 million. But Bangladesh will need hundreds of millions more to rebuild houses, reclaim farms, and restore water supplies.

Unnatural disasters, such as the famines and refugee crises that accompany wars, also need new attention. The U.N. is stymied when a member government refuses to acknowledge a crisis or puts its sovereignty ahead of the welfare of its people. In the Iraqi case, the United States, France, and Britain are protecting the Kurds because Saddam Hussein refuses to permit the U.N. to do so. In Ethiopia and the Sudan, private voluntary agencies try to provide assistance to starving refugees, but what gets in may be stolen by government forces or by rebels, or one side will try to block food deliveries to starve out the other. This is not a problem that will be solved soon. The nations of the world are not likely to agree upon a U.N. humanitarian force that would be able to ferry aid to refugees, and engage in combat, if necessary, to deliver its cargo. But just as the world has agreed to conventions barring war crimes and genocide, and just as all people regardless of nationality are declared to have inalienable human rights, the world can agree that starvation of a country's people by its government is a violation of international law. And that mechanisms for intervention should be established to end it.

NOTEBOOK

SKOL POLL: In his TRB column this week, Michael Kinsley argues that for a pregnant woman to have an occasional glass of wine (as opposed to engaging in heavy drinking) is nothing to get all het up about. Do you agree that the government should remove the warning labels now mandated by law? You can register your opinion on our Sound Off line, 1-900-726-6671.... Our poll two weeks ago asked whether the hysteria about political correctness on university campuses was excessive: 36 percent of callers thought so, but 64 percent found it perfectly justified.

MAKING WAVES: Whether or not President Bush decides to renew most-favored-nation trading status by June 3 (we hope he doesn't), he has an opportunity to do something else that really would foster democracy in China: start a radio station. Two bills currently before Congress would establish a foreign language radio service, modeled on Radio Free Europe, to beam uncensored news into the People's Republic. Exiled Chinese students credited Voice of America broadcasts with fueling the 1989 democracy movement by breaking Beijing's media monopoly. And although VOA continues to broadcast into China thirteen hours a day, Beijing has been jamming its signal. Radio Free China would broadcast a stronger signal from a new $100 million transmitter, probably based in the Philippines or Thailand. Unlike VOA, whose programming is mostly English lessons and American pop culture, Radio Free China would provide detailed news in Chinese dialects. The Chinese government is objecting very strongly, which is why Mr. Bush is leery, and also why it is such a good idea.

NATIONAL HYPOCHONDRIA WEEK: Feeling a bit under the weather? The National Exercise for Life Institute, which is funded by a sports equipment manufacturer, wants to remind you of the health advantages of in-house exercise equipment. "As you may know, May is National Physical Fitness & Sports Month, as well as National Arthritis Month, Mental Health Month, National High Blood Pressure Month, and Older Americans Month," according to the group's latest press re-

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lease. "May 12-18 is also National Osteoporosis Week." June, we presume, will have to be Lie-Down-and-Have-a-Few-Beers-to-Recover Month.

FINANCIAL FALLOUT: We're sorry to have missed a fascinating-sounding seminar at Boston's World Trade Center a few weeks ago. It was called "Remember Chernobyl: Business Opportunities." After a light breakfast, attendees heard a staff member from the Massachusetts Office of International Trade and two Ukrainian representatives to the United Nations make presentations on "business opportunities spawned from the nuclear plant disaster." Radioactive Big Mac, comrade?

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY: Congratulations to our Dupont Circle neighbor, the Brookings Institution, on turning 75. In a city where most think tanks are known for "research" that justifies their preconceived biases, Brookings has maintained a reputation for scrupulous objectivity and distinguished scholarship. We hope to remain neighbors, readers, and admirers for many years to come. ●

The great telephone giveaway.

OFF THE HOOK

By Charles Oliver

On December 20, 1989, the Federal Communications Commission conducted a public lottery for a permit to construct a cellular telephone system in the easternmost section of Massachusetts, a predominantly rural area encompassing Cape Cod. Nine hundred and twenty-five parties had applied, and the lottery proceeding was conducted in a festive atmosphere befitting the holiday season.

In physical terms, the FCC lottery was indistinguishable from Lotto America. Ten pingpong balls numbered 0 through 9 were placed in each of several cages. A blast of air was directed into each of the cages, and the balls swirled around until one of them flew out of the cage. For Cape Cod, three such balls together denoted the three-digit number associated with the winning applicant.

The winner for Cape Cod was a partnership group calling themselves the Rural Area Cellular Development Group (RACDG). But RACDG didn't develop anything. Seventy-three days after obtaining its construction permit from the FCC, it filed an application to transfer its permit to Southwestern Bell Mobile Systems. The FCC quickly granted its permission, and the transfer was consummated.

According to *Cellular Investor Newsletter*, a publication of the respected investment firm Paul Kagan Associates, Inc., the selling price for the Cape Cod construction permit was $40 million. The sale involved no tangible assets of any kind, nothing, that is, but the right to use a certain band of very scarce and valuable radio spectrum—an asset that had belonged to the government, but which the government gave away for nothing.

There was nothing wrong with the behavior of commission officials in this event, nor with that of the lottery applicants. Indeed, you may be kicking yourself that you didn't apply: a 1-in-925 chance of winning $40 million is worth nearly $43,000, substantially more than the $300 fee that some law firms charge for preparing applications. The scandal is that every action by every individual involved was not only perfectly legal but all too typical.

For years the Federal Communications Commission has been urging Congress to pass legislation authorizing it to assign radio licenses through competitive bidding instead of giving them away in lotteries. So far, Congress has refused. More often than not, the winners quickly turn around, sell their tickets to someone else, and pocket the proceeds.

Ultimately, nearly all commercial radio licenses are sold, either through acquisitions or through the gradual process of stock sales in the licensee corporations. After carefully analyzing the prices paid for cellular licenses in recent months, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration has concluded that the current market value of all cellular telephone licenses in the United States is somewhere between $46 billion and $80 billion, depending upon which appraisal methodology you use. That's a government giveaway greater than—and maybe twice as much as—the cost of Operation Desert Storm. It's about the same amount cut in the budget compromise last year from Medicare's funding for the next five years.

At a time when Congress and the administration are struggling to close the federal budget deficit, a $46 billion to $80 billion giveaway of scarce government assets is a scandal, but it's not the biggest one. When Congress first refused the FCC's requests for authority to auction radio licenses, nobody knew how popular cellular telephones would become or how valuable cellular spectrum would eventually be. But now we know. And the giveaways are still legal.

CHARLES OLIVER is senior policy adviser to the assistant secretary for communications and information. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commerce Department.

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WHITE HOUSE WATCH

RAW DEAL

By Fred Barnes

It was bad enough for Republicans that President Bush jettisoned his pledge of no new taxes. But he also went along with exactly the tax increase he had most wanted to avoid, a hike in personal income rates, and failed to get the one measure he had desperately craved, a cut in the capital gains tax rate. Small wonder, then, that the budget deal Bush and Congress cooked up last October was seen as a political calamity for the president, a profile in weakness. Bush's popularity fell. Budget director Richard Darman, the architect of Bush's budget strategy, was pilloried (by me, among others) for bringing the president to grief. The GOP was painfully divided, and a nasty feud erupted between the White House and House Republican Whip Newt Gingrich, who opposed the deal. And Democrats, many of them anyway, were gleeful.

They aren't anymore. The budget deal has come back to haunt them. Democrats agreed to spending caps and other restrictions that now keep them from launching serious policy alternatives to Bush's. They've become robots, and they'll stay that way right through the 1992 presidential election. "We're on automatic pilot here," complains Democratic Representative Mike Synar of Oklahoma. Bush has congressional Democrats exactly where he wants them: paralyzed on policy. He doesn't relish any new domestic legislation, and he doesn't want Democrats to pass any either. Depending on what they passed, Democrats might give momentum and visibility to a domestic issue on which Bush is vulnerable—health care comes to mind—and improve their political appeal. Now their chances of doing this are practically nil.

Scarcely a day goes by when some Democrat doesn't encounter the new restrictions. Not long ago Representative Charles Schumer of New York came up with the idea of a $150 million program to provide anti-drug therapy for addicted federal prisoners. This sounded like a sensible way to fight crime, a way the Bush administration wasn't pursuing. A study showed that 75 percent of convicts who'd undergone the therapy committed no crimes after release. So why not run with the program? Because the budget deal requires that money for a new proposal be offset by a commensurate cut in an existing program, or by a tax increase. That's hard to do. Current programs have constituencies, and Washington lobbies to protect them. Democrats are leery of raising taxes again. "The budget blocks you and boxes you in," Schumer told David Rosenbaum of *The New York Times.*

In truth, Darman planned it that way, and sold Bush on his plan. He was willing to give up a lot—the largest first-year tax increase in history, a $111 billion jump in overall spending from 1990 to 1991, a $20 billion boost in domestic discretionary spending. Bush took the hit for that last year. But he got a lot too, and now he is reaping the benefit. Darman held out for rigid spending caps and pay as you go. If a program jacks spending above the ceiling, it sets off an automatic across-the-board sequester, trimming every program. That's happened twice already, most recently in April when a "dire emergency" appropriation exceeded the domestic cap of $183 billion by a paltry $2.4 million. The cut was a tiny .0013 percent for every program (a total of $2.2 million), but the point is it went into effect immediately.

Just the threat of a sequester works. Democrats, having opposed the popular war against Iraq, were eager to spearhead fresh benefit programs for war veterans. The House passed $1.85 billion in new benefits, but didn't include any spending offsets or tax increases. The White House balked, saying it broke the budget deal and would trigger a sequester. The Senate caved in, authorizing $550 million that was paid for. The final bill was $655 million, also paid for. The political issue here is simple. Democrats wanted patriotic credit for championing lavish benefits. The budget deal denied them this.

The obvious place for Democrats to get money to fund new programs is the Pentagon. But that option is banned until 1993. Representative Leon Panetta, chairman of the House Budget Committee, says Darman was bent in the budget summit on getting "not only spending caps, but walls between those areas." The walls mean that defense spending cannot be robbed to pay for, say, a new health care program, at least not in the first three years of the five-year budget agreement. How did Darman get this? He plugged for it right through the final hours of negotiations with Senator Robert Byrd, the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Byrd was sympathetic to putting spending in compartments (defense, foreign, entitlements, domestic discretionary) because he wanted to stop the practice of paying for entitlement increases by limiting domestic programs. Darman and Byrd sealed the deal. And a new health care entitlement will have to be financed by cutting another entitlement or boosting taxes—both highly unpopular options.

To Bush's delight, the budget deal has made it almost impossible for Democrats to differentiate themselves on domestic policy. The House's 1992 budget comes closer to mimicking the administration's budget than any in more than a decade. "Limiting the national debate on the budget favors the Republicans," insists Democratic Representative Robert Torricelli of New Jersey. "The whole concept of an agreement that holds the government in place is acceptance of the status quo and that the direction of the country is satisfactory and the priorities proper." Torricelli voted against the deal. But Panetta, who helped negotiate the agreement, concedes the point. Democrats limited their ability to press domestic issues and embarrass Bush. "You can't make

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as dramatic a statement," he says.

Neither Darman nor Bush is gloating. That would needlessly enrage Democrats and might prompt them to break the agreement. Or it would infuriate Republicans who think Darman gave up too much, including the chance of tax cuts to ease the recession. Democrats gave up this chance too. If they wanted to propose a package of tax incentives to attack the "Bush recession," the budget deal would stand in their way. Dollar-for-dollar changes in a static budget, as the deal promised, all but rule this out.

They've also made Bush's re-election all but a certainty. Republican Senator Phil Gramm of Texas says they're prevented "from doing the one thing that can be counted on to expand their political base: creating new government programs and new constituencies." Gramm was among those who figured out last year that the Darman-done deal was re-election insurance for Bush. Synar was another. One Democrat said so publicly. "This is a bill to re-elect the president of the United States by statute," said Senator Daniel Moynihan of New York on October 18. "God save the president." Only a few Democrats took Moynihan seriously. Now many wish they had. ●

THE PRESS

'POST'-MORTEM

By Jacob Weisberg

To watch Washington's recent riot at close range, and then to read *The Washington Post*'s account of it, was an interesting lesson in the relationship between facts and sensitivity at a major urban newspaper. Anyone on the streets of Washington's Mount Pleasant and Adams Morgan neighborhoods during the melee saw, through a haze of tear gas, that hundreds of teenagers were rampaging through the streets, smashing windows, looting shops, burning police cars, and assaulting civilian vehicles with rocks and bottles. Yet the *Post* decided at the outset that what was happening did not qualify as a riot. On the first day the paper termed the event a "disorder." On the next it became a "disturbance."

Then there was the *Post*'s handling of the racial dimension of the conflict. The riot began when a Salvadoran man drew a knife on a black policewoman who was trying to arrest him for public drinking, and she shot him, not fatally, in the chest. The *Post* failed to mention the police officer's race, despite the fact that Hispanic-black antagonism (as well as the Hispanic-"police" tensions that the paper emphasized) was one important cause of the explosion. One editorial went so far as to identify the two officers as "both women, one Hispanic," as if to imply that there couldn't have been a racial factor in the public reaction to the shooting.

The issue of who the "disturbers" were was even touchier. On the second night, most if not all of the looting in Adams Morgan and Columbia Heights was carried out by black teenagers, many of whom came from outside the area. Yet in Tuesday's *Post*, little was done to correct the notion that on the second night, the uprising remained largely one of Latino "protesters," frustrated by poverty, joblessness, and unfair treatment by the police. The lead story had one reference to "a rampage of Hispanic and black youths, much of it aimed at property." Another story referred to a mob of young men throwing projectiles at a bus as "mostly Hispanic, but also including whites and blacks." In early editions, all the rioters portrayed in photographs looked Latino; later editions carried photographs of black rioters as well. But even the later editions left the overall impression that those breaking the law were either Hispanic or an indistinguishable mélange of races.

Nell Henderson, one of the metro reporters on the story, says that although most of the looters and rioters she saw Monday night were black, she did not include this in her story because "it was not their blackness that made them do it." But by failing to make this point, she inevitably gave the impression that Latinos were primarily responsible. And since the paper's line is that Hispanics rebelled, if not because they're Hispanics then because of what Hispanics are subjected to in Washington, it seemed odd to omit blacks lest their actions be blamed on their race rather than their social condition.

Occasionally it was possible to read the racial aspects of the story between the lines. On Friday a story by Gabriel Escobar appeared on the Metro section's front page, based on interviews with two Salvadorans who had been out looking for trouble on Tuesday night. According to the story, "The two men distanced themselves from the looting that took place in Adams-Morgan and Columbia Heights, blaming it on opportunists." I asked Escobar whether the word "opportunists" was theirs or his. Escobar said the Salvadorans used the word *morenos*, which means blacks. The *Post*'s other translation—or code word—for this was "outsiders."

In other stories, race was hinted at without being mentioned, producing reader bafflement. On Thursday a "Reporter's Notebook" story by Rene Sanchez purported to assess the "Culture Clash in Mount Pleasant," without naming the cultures involved. Most of it described the bad blood between Hispanic residents and Frank Smith, the Ward 1 city councilman who represents the area, but failed to point out that Smith was black or indeed to refer to blacks anywhere in the story.

The paper's editors argue they neither avoided the issue of race nor tried to diminish the scale of the violence. Leonard Downie, the *Post*'s managing editor, and Milton Coleman, the metropolitan editor, said they made no decision to omit the race of the arresting policewoman. Both defend the decision not to use the term "riot" by arguing that the scale of the unrest was

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insufficient to justify it. Reporters who worked on the story said that during the chaos there were frank debates in the newsroom about the appropriateness of racial references. According to Coleman, the paper's policy is not to mention race unless it's strictly relevant. In this case he wanted to be careful not to imply that a race riot was taking place. In the process, however, he was unable to convey an essential element of the story.

It's not surprising, of course, that the *Post* is hypersensitive about race, and about blacks in particular. When the paper put out the first issue of its revamped Sunday magazine in 1986, a local radio talk show host named Cathy Hughes attacked it as racist because it contained a story about a black rap singer charged with murder and a column by Richard Cohen sympathizing with a white jewelry store owner who refused to buzz young black males into his store. Hughes launched a "Take It Back" campaign, which dumped 300,000 copies of the magazine, some in flames, on the steps of the *Post* building on 15th Street. The magazine responded by publishing an apology and bending as far as possible in the other direction, even publishing a puff profile of Alton Maddox, who joined Al Sharpton in perpetrating the Tawana Brawley hoax. As part of a compromise settlement, Donald Graham, the *Post*'s publisher, agreed to appear on Hughes's show every six months for ten years to discuss the paper's local coverage. Hughes's comments on her show about Mount Pleasant—that Mayor Dixon should round Hispanics up, "check their green cards, turn them over to immigration, and get them out of my neighborhood, out of my city"—were reported in the *City Paper*, a free weekly, but not in the *Post*.

Many reporters acknowledge that the *Post* remains shellshocked where race is concerned. "I think at times this paper is too sensitive and too cautious when it comes to writing about the context of race," says Sanchez, who wrote the paper's lead stories about the riot through most of the week. Jill Nelson, a free-lancer who was until recently a *Post* staff writer, goes even further. "It was definitely my sense that paper was downplaying the element of race," she says. "I was out of town when the riot started, and when I came back I had to call around to get a sense of who the players were. It was not clearly articulated in the paper, which was tiptoeing around the issue."

Other papers did better—even the usually inferior, Moonie-owned *Washington Times*. The *Times* reported on Tuesday that Hispanics were incensed because a black policewoman—not just a policewoman, as in the *Post*—shot a Salvadoran man who was rumored to be handcuffed. It also pointed out that many Latinos believe black cops mistreat them and resent the overwhelmingly black city government. The lead headline on Friday's *Washington Times* was: "Most seized in riots not Hispanic." A story containing the same information was buried inside the *Post* a day later.

The out-of-town press was also more direct. A Thursday *Wall Street Journal* story analyzed the tensions between Hispanics and blacks in D.C. In a front-page story on Wednesday, Clifford Krauss of *The New York Times* stated bluntly: "Young blacks and teenage gang members took advantage of the mayhem, especially on the second night, to steal money and food." The same story discussed the deep ill-will between Hispanics and blacks in the area, pointing out that the two groups blamed each other for the violence. A waitress in a Salvadoran restaurant was quoted, saying that Hispanics threw rocks through store windows, but that blacks stole: "They've taken advantage of the situation and we get the blame."

This is what most of the Latinos in my neighborhood think. But you won't read it in *The Washington Post*.

A case of thyroid paranoia.

DESERT GLANDS

By Alex Heard

Already frisky little book titles are trotting up, flinging themselves at my feet, and waving all four legs in a frantic bid for attention. Basic choices: *Jittergate!* Or the dignified cadences of political science—something like *Hyper at the Helm: Geopolitical Consequence of the Overamped Presidency.*

Well, that will sort itself out eventually. The thing to do now is to keep whacking finishing nails into my theory, which occurred to me the moment I heard that President Bush has Graves' disease, a form of hyperthyroidism. The disease occurs when the thyroid gland receives false messages telling it that the body needs *more* of the peppy hormones that regulate metabolism, very often resulting in what one medical journal article frankly calls "overdrive." In Bush's case, his physician said, this appears to be what happened. With treatment, the First Doctor told reporters, "The American public may see 'a *slower* and *less frenetic* George Bush.' " (Emphasis mine.)

That, of course, raises obvious questions: Were we seeing a "speedier," more "superjuiced" George Bush during the biggest foreign policy crisis of the past ten years? Was the hand that signed the orders vibrating as fast as bumblebee wings? Did the eyes that never blinked also rarely shut?

Shocking? Yes. Controversial? No doubt. Trashy and irresponsible? You may say so, but I'll merely pick up my sticks and resume beating on the hollow log in the forest. The fight will be long and lonely, and many a mudball will trace a parabolic arc toward my work. Still, I'll hang in there, if necessary serving time on late-late-late-night talk radio shows with wall-eyed, frizzy-haired hosts who keep asking, "My God, YES! Why was this kept from the American people?" Eventually "Frontline" will be asking that. Until then it's dues-paying

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time, but things look hopeful. Even you avowed skeptics have to concede that HyperTheory gives off nostril-widening scent.

Consider. A 1988 study of the "psychiatric and neuropsychological symptoms" of thirteen untreated Graves' sufferers published in *General Hospital Psychiatry* reports "hypomania, compulsive personality, and obsessive-compulsive disorder." That would explain a few things. The temporary outlawking of the generals, who in retrospect come off like quavering flower children. All those buzzing White House aides who offered reporters verbal pictures of a wartime president who operated with the easy serenity of a snoozing Perry Como. *Just business as usual,* they would say, without even being asked. *Yep, taking it easy. Not gettin' too wrapped up in events.* Meanwhile, the president was probably doing two-a-day wind sprints in the White House corridors.

It would also shed light on the bizarre Plimpton Episode, which occurred when George Plimpton visited President Bush at Camp David many months before the war began—and found a man who already appeared to be mainlining coffee-bean extract. "George Plimpton knows competitors," Ken Adelman wrote of the visit in the February 1 *Washington Times.* "So what's Mr. Bush like when tested? 'Hugely competitive,' [Mr. Plimpton said].... Mr. Bush uses 'all these wonderful words to pep himself up. They're actually quite startling,' recalled Mr. Plimpton. One is 'Unleash Chiang!' an old phrase having to do with unleashing Chiang Kai-shek ... against the [Chinese] mainland." Mr. Plimpton admits, "I don't know why he keeps using it, but he does. If you're his tennis partner and he wants you to produce a big serve, Bush will call out, '*All right, now, unleash Chiang!*' " (Emphasis mine.)

Predictably, to counter the "troubling questions of judgment" raised by the specter of a pinwheel-orbed chief executive, the Bush camp has laid down a smoke screen. The official word is that Bush has had Graves' disease only "for the past six weeks." (Even though the doctors admit they don't really know this, because he was tested only recently.) Intended message: the manic behavior you witnessed before and during the war was different from what you've been seeing recently, when the president mosquitoed from one "yellow-ribbon TV show" to another and even threatened to fly to London and back in one day. No, the war hyperactivity was the *good* hyperactivity. The normal, healthy, action-man stuff you know and love.

Well I don't buy it, and I'm ready to go public. Clearly, however, the road will be even longer and harder than I'd reckoned. I knew the mainstream media would be hostile, of course. They will not wake up and smell the ammonia capsule until ten years from now, when Bush's doctor writes a *New York Times* op-ed called "Thousands of Tiny 'Chiangs' Urged the Commander in Chief: 'Go, Man, Go!' " What I hadn't counted on was the reception HyperTheory got from the men who traffic in this sort of information regularly—our nation's visionary, oft-reviled conspiracy theorists. I called a few dozen of them to float the theory and get their input. A typical response was that of Lud Arons, a dean of conspiracy-theory trackers, who works out of his home in Brookline Village, Massachusetts. He was intrigued by the idea that someone may have *planted* Graves' disease in Bush, but everything else only drew fire. "You're trying to tell me Bush's hyperthyroid 'caused' the war? You think Bush *matters*? Man, most people suck, but you *REALLY* suck! You don't even know who runs the *fucking world*!?" (Emphases, and there were plenty more of same, his.)

This "is-Bush-even-relevant" theme came up again in the most fully realized opposing theory I encountered—one offered by Art Rosenblum, a famed Philadelphia-based lefty who publishes *Aquarian Alternatives.* "Bush is merely a tool," Rosenblum said. "This whole thing was planned loooong before he came to power." Why? The key, it turns out, has nothing to do with hormones. It all comes down to one basic commodity. No, not oil. Although oil is involved. *Plastics.* Plastics? "Read *Arab Reach,*" Rosenblum said. The book describes the construction of two huge petrochemical cities in Saudi Arabia, designed to corner the global plastics-making market. "The purpose of this war was to seize control of that entire area," Rosenblum says.

Such theories, if true, render HyperTheory useless. And as chief guy in the HyperTheory movement right now, it falls on me to analyze and react rationally to competing belief systems, whenever and wherever they arise.

Or maybe I'm just getting hyperactive.

ALEX HEARD is a frequent contributor.

The president's Mexican mistake.

OFF-TRACK

By Ralph Nader and Michael Waldman

William Lehman has been a meat inspector for twenty-five years. Stationed in Sweetgrass, Montana, Lehman scrutinizes the beef, chicken, and pork that cross into this country from Canada each week. In 1989, however, Lehman received startling new orders from the Department of Agriculture. Canadian pork packers were arguing that the inspection program was a barrier to trade and violated the new U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement; in response, the American government pulled its sanitary cops off the beat. Today rules allow as few as one truck in fifteen to be inspected, and the inspector must first

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notify the meatpacking plant as to which truck will be stopped. If a sample is rejected, it is merely sent northward, where it will often be shipped back into the United States. According to Lehman, caravans of contaminated meat are crossing from Canada, tainted with pus, feces, and even metal shavings.

Meanwhile, Canadian asbestos producers, joined by the Canadian government, have challenged the U.S. asbestos ban in U.S. federal court, arguing that it is an "unnecessary obstacle to trade" under the terms of the 1988 agreement. If a federal Court of Appeals rules that the Canadians are correct, our government must once again let asbestos be sold in the United States—overriding hundreds of federal, state, and local laws and rules.

How can a basic "free trade" agreement interfere with such important health and environmental laws? The answer lies in what's known as the legislative "fast track," which allows the administration and its corporate allies to ram through Congress trade agreements that are full of deregulation loopholes. Because the U.S.-Canadian pact was put on the fast track, Congress had only sixty days to scrutinize it and could vote only up or down with no amendments. If the upcoming trade agreement with Mexico or the Uruguay round of GATT gets the same treatment, vital domestic legislation involving environmental protection, worker safety, and consumer law enforcement could be undercut. An anti-fast-track resolution has been introduced by Representative Byron Dorgan of North Dakota, and the administration is fighting to preserve the procedure, which extends automatically unless Congress says no. After all, with a fast-tracked trade agreement or two, President Bush could accomplish at the negotiating table in Geneva or Mexico City the deregulation he could never achieve on Capitol Hill.

When Richard Nixon slipped fast track into the 1974 Trade Act, he had an imperial presidency in mind more than deregulation. But Nixon's handiwork succeeded in potentially cutting Congress out of basic legislative decisions. The technical details of telephone-book-length trade agreements (the enabling legislation for the proposed GATT could total 4,000 pages) determine what domestic laws could be categorized as "barriers to trade" and what procedures will be used to resolve disputes. But under fast track, Congress is blocked from offering amendments that could fix defects in the agreement or protect domestic regulations from being classified as trade barriers. The only remedy for a legislator distressed about a particular provision is to vote down the entire proposal. And that's if lawmakers or citizens are lucky enough to discover all the legal trap doors embedded in the dense prose.

The administration is thus given a free hand writing trade agreements, a hand guided by multinational business. The U.S. Trade Representative office is notorious for the velocity of its revolving door to the private sector. The Center for Public Integrity reported last year that 47 percent of former top USTR officials have personally registered or their firms have registered with the Justice Department as foreign agents. The agency is advised by an official panel that is supposed to represent the public but that in fact almost entirely comprises Fortune 500 firms including Dow Chemical, IBM, AT&T, Procter & Gamble, General Electric, Boeing, and General Motors.

Trade officials have led a worldwide crusade for "harmonization," a euphemism for standardizing domestic regulations. In theory, harmonization lubricates world trade. In practice, it batters nations into reducing consumer and environmental regulations to the lower common denominator. The U.S.-Canada pact, for example, has not only undercut U.S. domestic legislation. Canada has long been more attuned to the dangers of acid rain than has the United States. Since the early 1980s, the Canadian government offered financial incentives to lead, zinc, and copper smelters to install pollution control devices to capture emissions. Now the trade association representing U.S. metal smelters is arguing that the Canadian ecology program is an unfair subsidy.

Because of the huge differences in regulatory standards across the Rio Grande, the Mexican agreement could dramatically undermine our environmental laws. The proposed GATT agreement, however, is even more worrisome. If a competitor challenges an American law under GATT, the United States must prove that its law does not violate the trade agreement. A panel of GATT nations, meeting in secret, decides these disputes. Sanctions or even monetary awards can be imposed if the offending nation refuses to budge. In recent years the United States has changed its laws every time it has been challenged under GATT (with the sole exception of a sugar quota to the government of Nicaragua).

The draft GATT agreement circulated in December 1990 would require the United States to adopt much weaker food safety standards, or be forced to prove a "reasonable scientific justification" to retain current rules. Under the proposed GATT standards, fruits and vegetables can contain DDT and other pesticides banned here. Indeed, GATT standards would require repeal of the stringent laws banning cancer-causing food additives and pesticides. These GATT standards are set by an obscure, international, industry-dominated commission known as the Codex Alimentarius. The Codex standard-setters are hardly disinterested: the nonvoting private sector contingent of a recent U.S. delegation included three officials from Nestle, one each from Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, Hershey, Ralston Purina, Kraft, and CPC International, as well as agents of trade associations for food processors and the American Frozen Food Institute.

Despite administration arguments to the contrary, without fast track trade agreements are not doomed to be picked apart by a special-interest-obsessed Congress. At least eighty-nine multilateral treaties, conventions, and trade agreements have been passed by Congress under the normal "slow track" since 1974. Some, such

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as the 144-nation telecommunications agreement or the 100-nation trademark treaty, were every bit as complex as GATT. We pass arms control treaties without fast track. Of course, the only thing at stake there is the survival of the planet.

President Bush and his business allies have launched a lavish publicity drive to extend fast track. Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari has toured the country to stump for the procedure, and Trade Representative Carla Hills is a regular Capitol Hill fixture. Not surprising, while the White House has played hardball, congressional Democrats have played whiffleball. Speaker Tom Foley enthusiastically supports fast track. House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt first sent President Bush a ten-page letter expressing worries about the environmental and job-loss consequences of a Mexico deal. Bush responded with a "read my lips" pledge to meet some of these concerns that was derided by most environmental groups and labor unions as disingenuous and unenforceable. Nonetheless, Gephardt halfheartedly announced his support of fast track.

What's really at work in all of these proposed agreements is the yearning by multinational firms to break free from the constraints of national sovereignty. They want global commerce, but without global law to hold them accountable. All the opponents of "fast track" are asking for is an accountable democratic procedure to make sure they don't get away with it.

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The way to fell Saddam.

TRIAL AND ERROR

By Laurie Mylroie

We may have won the war against Saddam Hussein, but he still clings to power, unrepentant and unreformed. His tenacity is clearest perhaps in Iraq's recent account of its weapons of mass destruction. As the State Department dryly noted, the account, mandated by the cease-fire arrangements, fell "far short of reality." Iraq also lied about its nuclear program to the International Atomic Energy Agency, denying at first that it had any nuclear weapons-usable material. It admitted eleven days later that it had enough uranium to make a nuclear bomb, but still won't tell where the uranium is. Iraq also continues to detain 5,000 Kuwaiti citizens and hasn't returned property stolen from Kuwait. And reports are emerging that Baghdad has launched a secret purchasing operation in Jordan to acquire material for arms factories.

All of these constitute violations of the U.N.-sponsored cease fire and have occurred while the allies occupy northern Iraq and economic sanctions are in full effect. A more acute question is, what will happen when these conditions do not hold? It is becoming increasingly clear that the only sure way to enforce the cease-fire resolutions is to address the source of the problem: Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi population might have succeeded in toppling Saddam last March if the administration had been prepared to back its verbal incitement with a little support from the air. A coup now appears to be out of the question. If the United States wants an end to Saddam, it will have to take the lead itself.

Should we just assassinate him? It would certainly be the easiest method, but it's against American law, and in any event his extraordinary security precautions make it impractical. The only realistic course is to launch a vigorous and sustained campaign using economic and political measures to isolate and punish the Baath regime. Such a campaign should begin with a war crimes trial that would investigate and publicize the atrocities committed by Baghdad and help mobilize a critical number of foreign countries more effectively against Saddam.

In April the European Community—following a German initiative—called for war crimes trials. The EC argued that Baghdad's near-genocidal treatment of its own population was a continuing threat to international peace and security. The U.S. Senate quickly backed the idea, only to have the administration scotch it, arguing that trials in absentia might simply preserve Saddam in power—a version of the old argument that all Western pressure on the Saddam Husseins of this world is doomed to fail because Arabs will rally around them. Events since August 2 have demonstrated how mistaken that argument is. The administration also argued that trials would pre-empt the chance of Saddam seeking exile abroad. But Saddam doesn't seem to be considering that option.

The U.N. already has the procedure for a trial in place. Security Council Resolution 674, passed last October, urged holding the regime responsible for violations of international law. True, Moscow or Beijing might not like to pursue that idea now—possibly for fear of interfering with their Middle East interests or establishing a precedent that could someday be used against them—and might threaten to veto it. But if the West told the Soviets and Chinese that ousting Saddam was a quid pro quo for economic assistance and trade concessions, both would likely back down. That's been another lesson learned since August 2.

Even as preparations for a war crimes trial proceed, the U.N. Security Council should declare the present regime illegitimate as long as Saddam remains in power. This should lead to a ban on all direct commercial relations with Baghdad. At some point Iraq will have to

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sell oil or gain access to its frozen assets in order to provide for the population's basic needs. But that income should not be made available to the Iraqi government for purposes that violate the cease-fire provisions, as Saddam intends. It should be held by an international body that would distribute those funds only for Iraq's legitimate imports.

The international community should also deny Iraq representation in international organizations, including the U.N. General Assembly, as suggested by Hassan Chalabi, an international lawyer in the Iraqi opposition. A sustained campaign like the one taken against South Africa could be mounted. Countries that have kept diplomatic relations with Iraq should be encouraged to break them, and no country should renew diplomatic ties that are currently broken.

Even if it were not possible to pursue these goals through the U.N. because of a Soviet or Chinese veto, the West can pursue many of them on its own. Kuwait wants to conduct war crimes trials but will not go after any big Iraqi malefactors alone. The Western countries could provide political backing to Kuwait to conduct trials under its national jurisdiction. True, Saddam would remain in Baghdad, but the regime would be politically isolated, and top thugs would be subject to arrest if they tried to leave the country.

Proclaiming Saddam's regime to be illegitimate would also provide greater coherence to U.S. policy. The U.S. Army in northern Iraq would stop issuing identity cards to Iraqi policemen, which would evict them completely from the allied zone and prevent others from entering. This might even enable the United States to get over its squeamishness about dealing directly with the Kurdish leadership, as Turkey began doing in late February. The U.S. Army maintains a liaison office with the Iraqi army, but the State Department has failed to respond to Kurdish proposals to establish a similar office in the north. The Kurds, particularly the leading guerrilla figure, Massoud Barzani, have much information on Saddam and the area generally. Developing ties with the Kurds could also help avoid accidental clashes, misunderstandings, and even unnecessary American casualties.

The Soviet U.N. ambassador said recently that Iraq should "now be treated normally, like any other state in the region." President Bush has declared that "history" will take care of Saddam. Already the legitimization of Saddam has begun.

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Getting Even

In post-Persian Gulf war analysis, one critical point has not been stressed sufficiently. This is Saddam Hussein's personality and its significance for the future so long as he is in Baghdad.

Again and again the man has been called a thug, a mafioso, a ruthless dictator crazed with bloodlust, drunk with self-love, devoid of all humane impulse. All of this is deserved. Less tribute has been paid to his intelligence, his cunning, his adaptability, his perseverance, his coolness under duress—and to his leadership. Indeed, few have noted the heroic measure of these qualities.

It doesn't happen often in history that one man holds in his hand the very existence of his nation, and through his nation that of other nations, and perhaps of humanity itself. But it has happened. If Lincoln had been murdered in April 1861 instead of 1865, the United States might not exist today. And if Hitler had disappeared in January 1939, who can doubt that there would not have been a Second World War? Göring, Hess, Himmler, and the rest were just not made of the same stuff.

When President Bush called Saddam another Hitler, he was not applying a *façon de parler.* Once you have recognized a Hitler, and you have the power to retaliate that President Bush had, you either do nothing in the hope that your own constituency, in the narrow sense, will be spared, or you retaliate at all costs. Anything less than total success is suicidal. The mind boggles at the vision of what would have happened to civilization if Churchill and Truman had concluded a settlement with Hitler on, say, April 20, 1945, when the war was won and even Hitler realized it. One ally or the other could have persuaded them that smashing Hitler meant a victory for "Bolshevism," and by the rules of realpolitik, this could be prevented by, it might have been said, "an advantageous arrangement with a Führer reduced to size." (Adding that "the German army itself would liquidate Hitler because surely it had realized that Hitler had landed it in a horrible mess.")

Saddam Hussein does not forget and forgive. His foes brought him close to perdition and then let him off, being weak fools as he had always known, though their weakness and foolishness turned out differently than he had foreseen. He will strive to exact revenge so long as there is life in his body. He will smirk and conciliate and retreat and whine and apply for fairness and generosity. He will also make sure that within his home base it remains understood that he has not changed and will never change, with all the means he has shown in the past for making himself understood. And the day will come when he will hit—we do not know with what weapons, nor does he now know himself. And when he does hit he may, by the grace of God, miscalculate as he has miscalculated in the past. But even so the innocent will pay by the millions.

This must never be put out of mind: Saddam Hussein from now on lives for revenge. All else—Kurds, Saudis, chemical armaments, Western contacts, competent media—however important for present consideration, become traps, perhaps deadly traps, when not related to the main issue. If this sounds irrational or paranoid, it is no more or less so than he is, and it is he who is the measure.

URIEL DANN

URIEL DANN, author of *Iraq Under Qassem* (Praeger), is a visiting fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

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The statelessness of Kurds and Palestinians.

UNPROMISED LANDS

By Martin Peretz

Among the national minorities in the Middle East that have been kept from political self-expression, the Kurds are not alone. But they are the largest such minority. Neither Arabs nor Semites, they are an ancient, distinct people who can honestly trace their history back to the time of Cyrus the Great. They speak an Indo-European language all their own. Twenty-odd million of them, roughly as many as ethnic Persians, live in the contiguous territory of what was once called Kurdistan. The Kurds, unlike the tribes of Lebanon or some of the nationalities trapped in the Soviet Union, do not claim independence to the exclusion of other indigenous groups. They have a homogeneous country and a history of their own. Few people deserve the sobriquet "nation" more richly than these people, who have run their own daily affairs on their own lands for millennia.

Twice in this century the Kurds were given auguries of self-determination, and twice were betrayed. The Treaty of Sèvres, which in 1920 allocated the vast territories of the defeated Ottoman Empire, envisaged an autonomous Kurdish state leading to independence. But it was never ratified by the Turks, and the decisive ally, Britain, whose troops had occupied all of Mesopotamia since 1918, became increasingly committed to its new satrapy of Iraq. At the behest of Britain, the League of Nations awarded Iraq the Kurdish area of Mosul and, more to the point, the oil riches around it. With that act, the future of Kurdish prosperity was handed to their future oppressors.

After the Second World War, a Kurdish republic was proclaimed by rebels in the part of Iran then occupied by the Soviet Union. The republic lasted a year. After the Red Army's retreat in 1946, and with the collusion of Britain and the United States, Tehran crushed the Kurds. Although there have been various risings in Kurdistan in the intervening forty-five years, they all seemed forlorn. The Kurds' fate echoed again and again their initial betrayal after the First World War. They had had no friends then to argue for them in Western capitals. They have few such friends now.

Nowhere has the Kurdish agony been more excruciating and unremitting than in Iraq. There, ever since the British in 1921 handed over political power to a feeble Sunni chieftain from the Arabian desert (the French had just ousted him, after one year, as ruler of Damascus), the Kurds have been the targets of relentless, routine persecution. In 1969 sixty-seven Kurdish women and children were burned alive in a cave into which they had escaped to seek refuge from shelling. Two years later some 40,000 Kurds were expelled from the country. During 1974 and 1975 the regime napalmed Kurdish villages and dispossessed many thousands of civilians. Samir al-Khalil's scrupulous book, *Republic of Fear*, testifies to summary executions, assassinations, and public hangings.

This bloody history somehow eluded President Bush and Secretary of State Baker. They were thus dumbfounded by Baghdad's recent brutalities. The hatreds mystified them, and did not truly outrage them. The crimes did not cross formal borders, after all; nor did they correlate with the traditional idea of a civil war, where brother fights against brother. But they were crimes nonetheless; and crimes that would have been particularly noxious to a new world order with any genuine claims to moral or historical seriousness.

In the aftermath of Desert Storm, we pushed the Shiites' suffering out of our minds. But the Kurds did not go so gently. They fled by the hundreds of thousands, their dead and dying paraded for weeks on end in prime time. So, despite his efforts to evade responsibility, George Bush was finally forced to acknowledge that the United States had to do something for them. What he did not acknowledge—because he did not grasp it—was what it was precisely that we owed them.

Humanitarian aid is not enough. The Kurds of Iraq are not survivors of an earthquake. They are the permanently endangered victims of a government that won't integrate them into the body politic as long as they are Kurds and can't integrate them precisely because they are Kurds. That is to say, their plight is hopeless because they are not Arabs. And Iraq is an Arab state: a Sunni Arab state, at that. As Hannah Arendt pointed out once after self-determination replaced empire in Eastern Europe, in many cultures only nationals can truly "be citizens, only people of the same national origin could enjoy the full protection of legal institutions." Nowhere is this truer than in the Middle East.

This is a notion difficult for Americans to grasp. Ours, after all, is ostensibly a nationality of nationali-

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ties: our ideal and imperfect practice is a citizenship devoid of ethnic or cultural determinism. Or at least it has been until recently when everything from public contracts to the composition of juries, from the character of election districts to academic appointments, is constrained by these considerations. But the Arendtian proposition is axiomatic in those regions where modern liberalism has yet to permeate, where men are either kin or enemies. It is true today among peoples in the Soviet empire and in Yugoslavia, in Romania and Czechoslovakia, in India and Indonesia, in Ireland and South Africa. The Middle East is hardly a more open and inclusive place than these.

Arendt argued further—and in a vein still more alien to American sensibilities—what she thought leaders of the great nations "knew only too well, that minorities within nation-states must sooner or later be either assimilated or liquidated." It is an unbearable thought, but borne out across the globe. In the Arab world there is the added irony that the dominant "state people" are often themselves minorities, numerically weaker and sometimes culturally less coherent than the groups they rule. Assimilating the majorities is neither enticing to them nor, history tells them, feasible. Total liquidation ordinarily being impossible, mass murders are common measures of temporary pacification. That's why the Arab wars are forever.

There are many examples of this, but take Syria. There the "state people" and especially its ruling elites are drawn not simply from the schismatic Alawite Muslim sect (12 percent of the population) but more narrowly from the Matawira tribe and, even more narrowly, from the Numailatiyya clan. Indeed, those who hail from Qardaha, Hafez Assad's birthplace, are the most favored among the tiny cohort that rises to the top. These Alawites are joined by a myth of common unity, as distinct from the Sunnis, the Druze, and the remnant Christian sects. Other Syrians are just that: "other." In states where one group routinely wields the whip over another—even where they may both be Arab—citizenship is an abstraction connoting neither loyalty nor rights. Aside from those in the ruling group, there are no citizens, merely stateless people.

There are two major stateless peoples in Iraq, its Kurds and its Shiites, and several smaller sects and ethnicities. The regime itself is run by an ideological kleptocracy drawn, as in Syria, from a "state people," which is a fragment of a fragment of the populace. This group brutalizes because nothing but brutality would sustain its power. Indeed, the Iraqi ruling group is far more ferocious than the Alawites in Syria. The Alawites, a heretic creed made up mostly of rural believers, brutalize because of their own fear. The Sunni elites in Iraq, however, brutalize with the swagger that comes from the knowledge that, although they make up only one-fifth of their country, they are of the dominant branch of Islam. But even in Baghdad itself the Sunnis are a small minority, which is why, had the coalition forces gone on to the capital, they would have been welcomed as liberators.

There is no mystery here. As the Shiite historian Abas Kelidar has written, almost no one "accepts the state of Iraq in its present form . . . it remains an artificial political entity . . . nationalism as advocated by the Iraqi political elite could appeal to only one community." The identity cards of the Shiites named them as Iranians, regardless of where they had been born. Thus, it was easy to expel them, and expelled they were. In the late 1970s, 200,000 of them were put across the border with nary a peep from anyone in the West.

Saddam Hussein preferred to liquidate his Kurdish problem by inducing them to flee. Let them, he thought, vex his old enemy Turgut Ozal of Turkey, already burdened by more than 9 million Kurds who do not think of themselves as Turks. Saddam has now been forced to pretend that he welcomes his Kurds back and that he will grant them some measure of self-rule. He has even produced from the Talabani family of longtime and certified Kurdish quislings some mountaineers quick to cut a deal with Baghdad. But Saddam's refusal to accept U.N.-supervised safe havens betrays his enduring motives. And the Kurds' seasoned instincts tell them that they are being brought to the slaughter. Most of them, of course, are not going home. They are going to hastily constructed refugee camps where they will linger until the protecting coalition forces leave. Then the safety of the Kurds will depend for the long haul on U.N. forces—hardened troops from places such as Finland and Fiji—like those who kept the peace so well in Lebanon.

This is not, then, the end of a problem but its beginning. When the short haul is over, the worst is likely to happen again. Modest estimates put the Kurdish civilian death toll at 250,000 in the decade before the current atrocities. It is in the very logic of Iraq's pan-Arab ambitions that the Kurds shall be such objects once more, the more so in that Baghdad's more grandiose plans have, for the moment at least, been frustrated.

Pushing the Kurds into "safe havens" in an unchanged Iraq is no way out. The coaxing of the Kurds back into Iraq is really bullying them back into the areas of danger. It is an example of what Arendt described in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: "Non-recognition of statelessness always means repatriation, i.e., deportation to a country of origin, which either refuses to recognize the prospective repatriate as a citizen or, on the contrary, urgently wants him back for punishment." The sin of the Kurds was not some particular acts or thoughts but, as with other stateless peoples, "what they unchangeably were."

Without national rights, in short, the Kurds are without human rights. The Bush administration won't for a moment acknowledge this awful truth. It is true nonetheless, because the political culture of Iraq makes it a case *in extremis* of a state that is not an instrument of law but an instrument of the "state people," this minority of the Sunni minority. There is an important distinc-

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tion between human rights and national rights that is illumined by the Iraqi case. Many peoples in the world crave political expressions of their national rights. But, failing to achieve these, they are not everywhere without human rights, which are the elementary freedoms—to physical safety, to work, to opinions—said to be inalienable and independent of citizenship and nationality. The Basques have these in Spain without national rights, as do Irish nationalists in the United Kingdom, and, if I dare say so, the Palestinian Arabs in Israel. But in Iraq the most elementary freedoms depend on both citizenship and nationality. When the administration let stand the structure of Iraqi power it let stand the utter rightslessness of the Kurds.

The complicity of the administration in the forfeiting of the human rights of the Kurds is a direct consequence of its calamitous and callous endgame in the war against Iraq. It is a remarkable spectacle. Within hours the United States abdicated the power it had won in the Gulf, leaving behind incalculable anguish in Kurdistan and in southern Iraq: demolished homes, razed villages, disintegrated social structures, and, of course, the irreplaceable dead. To have won a war against a monstrous regime and nonetheless to have permitted it the mass murder of civilians is a debacle that will sully American policy for years to come. The tragedy, moreover, is not yet finished. The Baath is still on good behavior, and will be as long as American soldiers remain in place. The food, the blankets, the medical inoculations provided by coalition personnel have only temporarily impeded Baghdad's objectives.

But what is more remarkable is the rationale for this abandonment of the national cause and human rights of the Kurds. Neither the president nor the secretary of state has conceded what is obvious to serious observers: the United States turned its back on the Kurds of the north and the Shiites of the south, before we even knew quite what was actually occurring there, out of deference to Saudi anxieties and sensibilities. Saudi Arabia is the ally that the Bush administration values most highly. (Neither Bush nor Baker has ever felt that special tie that has bonded Americans to Israel through thick and thin.) And if the Saudis feared a non-Arab state in Kurdistan and a non-Sunni state in the Shiite areas of Iraq, we'd do everything to prevent these from coming to pass. So the administration, in an extraordinary military achievement, had won a unique opportunity for the liberation of the Kurds, but chose instead to betray them in order to take up another cause—a cause tangential to the events of the Gulf war and far from the region where the United States wields the most leverage. The cause was the plight of a people whose claims to nationhood are less profound than the Kurds', and whose lonely role in the Gulf war was vociferously to support our enemy. I mean, of course, the Palestinian Arabs, James Baker's perennial obsession.

To compare the claims to nationhood of the Kurds and the Palestinian Arabs makes for some interesting ironies in the politics of the Middle East. The passion for a distinctive Palestinian state among the Arabs, unlike that among Kurds for a Kurdish state, is derived less from that people's intrinsic history than from their intimate encounter with the Jews. It is no longer politically correct to say that without Zionism there is no Palestinian people, but it contains a good deal of truth. Until 1948, as Professor Aziz Haidar of Bir Zeit University on the West Bank put it, the Palestinians "did not constitute a group that had any sort of crystallized ethnic identity—cultural, religious, or based on community, life-style, or language. Instead, they were a part of the Middle Eastern Arab population. Actually, the differences between the Palestinians and the bordering peoples of the region were less obvious than the differences within the Palestinian population itself." A more apologetic scholar, Muhammad Y. Muslih, concedes the same: until the 1920s "there is no Arabic name for Palestinian nationalism." And even after there was a nationalist nomenclature, the particular idea remained in constant struggle with more generalized pan-Arab aspirations. The establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine after the war was, of course, made possible by the fact that a large amount of land in Palestine was already owned by Jewish national institutions. Much of it had been sold by Arab notables. One can understand poor Arab peasants doing that for cash. It is slightly harder to comprehend why members of the Arab Executive and the Arab Higher Committee—many of them ostensibly militant nationalists, some of whom had actually organized riots against the Jews—sold land to the Zionists. Lists of such sellers go on for many pages in the scholarly studies dealing with this matter. One thing you cannot say about the Kurds is that they sold or abandoned their patrimony.

This does not mean, of course, that the Palestinians do not deserve some form of autonomy, along the lines of the Camp David accords. They do. Some species of subsovereignty, like the paradigm proposed for the Kurds by Brian Uruquart, former undersecretary general of the United Nations, would allow the Palestinians self-rule and reassure the Israelis on security issues. My comparison between the two stateless peoples is intended simply to raise the question of why an ancient historic people like the Kurds can be effortlessly sidetracked, while the Palestinians, with a newer and more ambiguous identity, press on everybody's agenda.

Even those sympathetic to the plight of the Kurds, such as Harvard professor Stanley Hoffmann, rarely go so far as to support their right to an independent state. But they do not flinch at such options for the Palestinians. At a recent Harvard meeting, Professor Hoffmann preferred to offer the Kurds succor under international "Minority Treaties," the kind through which the League of Nations was so effective in protecting the Jews, Slavs, and Gypsies from their tormentors. Why such meager measures for the Kurds and such urgency for the Palestinians? "Because the Palestinians won't settle for less." It does not make for a particularly convincing moral—or prudential—argument.

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The administration was certain the epilogue to the Gulf war would be a prologue to Arab-Israeli peace. So certain, in fact, that it blinded itself to the actual epilogue taking place in the north of Iraq. We were told that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had shown new flexibility and new openness toward Israel. Baker would produce these valued allies at the beginning of the process. And they would produce not only conciliatory Syrians but also Palestinians who were more than mere marionettes of the PLO in Tunis. Reassured about a changing climate in the Arab world, Israel would then be expected to be forthcoming toward the Palestinians. But, as an old Arab proverb has it, "The words of the night are erased by the day." Baker has been able to deliver almost nothing of what he had promised from the salient Arabs. Instead of Saudi Arabia taking the lead in the accommodation of the Arab world to Israel, it has chosen to hide behind the robes of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and to do this only after frantic pleas from America.

In retrospect, one wonders why any of us believed that the Saudis would come out from the shadows to sit with the Jews. Saudi Arabia is not central, the secretary now opines, because it is not a front-line state. Well, in every war it was a front-line state, and more than symbolically. It always sent troops and, more important, it always sent money. So having rescued the Saudi monarchy from the clutches of Saddam, the administration still has precious little leverage over it. It prefers to use its leverage over Israel: the financial power to make the Soviet migration a success or a failure. Even a hard-line government like Shamir's cannot be altogether indifferent to these realities.

It is a curious logic that abdicates power in the Gulf and asserts it in Israeli-Palestinian affairs. The United States fought linkage all along in the Gulf, and yet now linkage is the cornerstone of its postwar policy. We defeated Saddam only to keep him in play. We thwarted Saddamism only to give a new lease on life to its deadly and cherished illusions. And one of those illusions is that the Palestinian Arabs deserve so much more, and deserve it so much more urgently, than the people whose future we accidentally brightened, only to condemn to sudden and certain eclipse. ●

The 'pesh merga' fight for survival.

BACK TO THE HILLS

By Michael Kelly

MOUNT AZMER, IRAQ

The Kurdish rebel stronghold here consists of a few dozen men on a little scrabble-patch of dirt on the edge of a small plateau just below the top of the hill. The men have Kalashnikov automatic rifles and a 106mm anti-tank gun, and two mortars that look like lengths of old, green pipe some careless plumber left in the rain too long. Near the mortars, on the ground, are a couple of hundred loose rounds of anti-aircraft ammunition that likewise have been scabbed over with rust.

But high ground covers a multitude of sins. The mountain overlooks the big Kurdish city of Sulaimaniya, fifty miles from the Iran-Iraq border, about 180 miles north of Baghdad. About six miles distant, the city is home to 30,000 Iraqi army troops. When, in a series of attacks between April 7 and April 12, Saddam Hussein's soldiers left the safety of Sulaimaniya and tried to take this sorry little outpost, they couldn't do it. The *pesh merga* (as the rebel fighters call themselves) claim that their 150 defenders held off 500 to 600 army troops, three tanks, and a helicopter attack, killing 110 of the enemy and taking only fifteen dead on their side.

Press reports on the post-Gulf war Kurdish uprising in Iraq have tended toward the view that the Iraqi army crushed the rebellion in a massively one-sided victory. The view from Mount Azmer suggests a more complicated truth. The real nature of things is a delicate balance of power between Saddam's men in the cities and the Kurds in the hills. "The weapons we have are defensive mainly," said Derwish Ibdula Arhma, a military strategist for the Kurdish Democratic Party, one of the top two of Kurdistan's five political parties. "A few anti-tank weapons and light weapons, five or six partially damaged tanks. It really is not much, while the army still has major offensive power in its helicopter gunships and advanced tanks." It would be extremely difficult, Ibdula figures, for the *pesh merga* to retake a major city by force. "On the other hand, the army cannot retake all Kurdistan," he said. "The more spread out it gets, the less control it has."

Saddam's forces, immeasurably aided by U.S. complicity, did indeed crush the rebellion in the large cities

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of the region, most notably Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya. They bombed the cities with helicopter gunships, inflicting much death and driving as many as 3 million people into the countryside and toward the dubious sanctuary of Turkey and Iran. (At least in the case of Kirkuk, *pesh merga* leaders say, U.S. fighter jets watched from overhead.) The Iraqi army then occupied the big cities and held them by sheer force of numbers.

But the story outside the few Iraqi army strongholds is precisely the opposite. Here, in a broad swath of land running the length of Kurdistan along the Iraq-Iran border and along much of the Iraq-Turkey border, the *pesh merga* completely hold the field. These rebel-controlled territories, which the Kurds call "freedom places," are rarely less than thirty miles wide and generally stretch up to sixty miles or more inland from the borders. Within these, the Iraqi army is limited to a very few cites, such as Dahuk, fifty miles from the Turkish border, from which American forces were attempting to oust them in the first two weeks of May.

In eight days of traveling through the Kurdish countryside, I never saw an Iraqi soldier, except as a distant, binocular-viewed bug on the horizon. I saw many hundreds of rebel fighters, well-armed with AK-47s, RPGs, heavy machine guns, anti-aircraft guns, and mortars taken from captured government caches. They thronged the roads and villages, and had established a large network of camps and checkpoints that kept in touch through sophisticated shortwave radios, also courtesy of the Iraqi army.

Neither the Iraqi army nor the Iraqi civil authorities can operate at all in the countryside of Kurdistan. The well-armed men of the *pesh merga* own the turf, and act like it, lolling about in their hidden hilltop camps, tearing about in their liberated Toyota Land Cruisers, shooting their guns about in the evening air, and all in all strutting high, wide, and handsome.

One afternoon a local *pesh merga* chief (who looked unexpectedly like George Bernard Shaw) suggested we take a break from drinking cocoa by the waterfall and visit the front lines. We went in the usual caravan—forty or so men, with 100 or so assorted rifles and pistols, in seven or eight four-wheel drive machines, including a pickup with a .50-caliber machine gun in the back. It took two hours to cover the twenty miles, because all the *pesh merga* military leaders are politicians, or all the Iraqi Kurdish politicians are *pesh merga* military leaders, and they brake for handshakes. We drove through the usual sort of scenery: past meadows of Ireland-green grass and purple thistles and glorious yellow wildflowers, past 10,000 desperately sick, dying people, past countless blown-up houses, past the shot-up and abandoned outposts of the Iraqi army.

After a while we stopped at a widening in the road where a group of ten or twelve men with guns stood around to form a checkpoint. We walked with them a few hundred yards to a second checkpoint in the road, where a smaller group of men stood next to two .50 caliber guns and a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, both set on tripods. Manning the machine guns was a young man who had wrapped so many overlapping bandoliers of ammunition around his torso that he seemed to be wearing an extremely well-armored cummerbund up to his armpits.

This, it turned out, was a major position of the Kurdish southern front line. The Iraqi army was five kilometers distant, standing guard over its own more elaborate front. Through binoculars you could see a line of seven dug-in tanks stretched along a ridge, and a few dots that were presumably enemy soldiers. Traffic moved freely through the two checkpoints. The *pesh merga* guards, at least, hardly slowed the cars and trucks for the most cursory of checks. A small flock of black mountain sheep, with curly horns and witchy white and black eyes, moved slowly and stupidly by. "As you can see, this is a pretty relaxed situation," said the commander, in a slightly apologetic tone. "The fact is, the Iraqi army is more afraid of us than we are afraid of them."

This may have been an exaggeration, but it is extraordinary it could be said with a straight face at all. The checkpoints manned by the careless young Kurds were Iraqi army posts; two months ago they were the property of Saddam's gunsels. The land we were driving through—like all of the land that makes up the *pesh merga*-held territory—had been under the total control of the Iraqi army for years, in some cases for a decade or more. This country is the heart of Kurdistan. To realize what it means that the Kurds have taken it back, it is important to understand exactly what Saddam did in taking it away.

The Iraqi regime has always taken care to keep foreigners out of Kurdistan, and it is easy to see why they would want to hide what they did. Jelal Talibani, leader of the pre-eminent Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, and others who claim to have kept track of the wreckage say the Iraqi army, enforcing Saddam's plan to depopulate rural Kurdistan and relocate its people in the more easily controllable big cities, dynamited twenty-eight Kurdish cities and at least 4,000 villages from 1974 to 1990, with the greatest carnage in the late 1980s. I don't know if the figure is inflated, but it is certain the destruction was vast and thorough.

When I first walked into Iraq, over a mountain pass from Iran, I asked a Kurdish refugee traveling part of the way with me to point me first in the direction of one of those destroyed villages everyone talked about. "Why, you are in one now," he said. I looked around at the steep hillsides and, after a moment, the jumble of stones strewn everywhere organized themselves into lines and squares, like one of those trick drawings that changes from a wine goblet to two faces, and I realized I was looking at the foundations of a village of many houses. This was the town of Terwella, built a long, long time ago, on the banks of a gin-clear brook, blown up in 1986.

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Around the bend of the road were the remains of Dara Kaysar and Naranjala. "Look what has happened to my people. Look what Saddam has done," said the old man who took me there, looking at the rubble spread over three hillsides. Every mile brought the sight of another ruin: Hormal, built in 1977 to house Kurds moved from previously destroyed villages, in turn dynamited in 1985. Nawprez, situated in an especially pleasant spot near where a single silver pour of water falls straight into a turquoise pool, destroyed so thoroughly it would take a team of archaeologists just to reconstruct the outlines. Penjwan, a good-sized city of 70,000 people, reduced in 1983 to a messy pile of stones and concrete jumble and rusting iron and steel. Saed Sadek, with 40,000 homes, which took fifteen days to blow up completely and where now almost nothing tops three feet.

The dynamiting was preceded by the forced evacuation of the people who lived in the wrecked towns. First they were moved from their old, isolated hillside villages to new cities built on flatland more accessible to the Iraqi army and security forces. Then those were TNTed too, and the people were moved again, to settlements in and near the major Kurdish cities. The destroyed areas were sealed off and guarded by numerous checkpoints, and no one but soldiers and government men were allowed to go there. By 1991 most of Kurdistan was a military zone.

The *pesh merga* reclamation has brought, remarkably quickly, a return of people to the places where no Kurds were ever supposed to live again. In every ruined village and city, hundreds and thousands of families now huddle in pancaked buildings, in tents, in lean-tos made from tree limbs and plastic sheets and scraps of metal. Most of the people are refugees from Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya, desperate for any shelter, even a broken slab of concrete. Many, however, are people who seized the chance to return to their hometowns and begin building something new. The man who looked like Shaw, for instance, had been a wealthy businessman in Baghdad and a commanding officer of a thousand men in the Iraqi Popular Army. He left, he says, a $400,000 house in Baghdad, and brought his wife, three young children, and most of his troops to a spot not far from where he was born. He lives in a big tent in the middle of a leafy, sun-dappled clearing in the woods, and he says he is having the best time of his life.

Indeed, the life of the *pesh merga* leaders, returned to the land, had a hard but lovely charm. One evening a local commander took me home for dinner at his family's hilltop camp. As his wife made a small fire, we walked down the hill to bathe in a pool of cold, clear water. As I washed, my host slipped off into the brush, stalking dinner. He rested his Kalashnikov on a tree branch and took a long, steady sight on a blackbird perched on a limb sixty yards away. He fired once, and the bird fell. He showed it to me, so I could marvel at his shooting. Since a direct hit would have exploded the tiny bird, he had shot just to graze its breast, the bullet plowing a neat, bloody furrow a quarter-inch deep. Back at the camp, as he prepared the body of the bird for supper, he cut off the head and gave it to his delighted three-year-old daughter. She played with her toy, opening and shutting its tiny yellow beak, stroking its fine black feathers.

Nowhere was this serenity and recovery more evident, or more poignant, than in Halabja, the scene of Kurdistan's greatest crime. On March 17, 1988, according to witnesses, Iraqi warplanes used bombs and rockets with chemical warheads against the people of this city, killing about 5,000 and forcing the rest to flee to Iran. It was three days before it was safe to return, and by then the dead clogging the streets and roads were so far gone that the burial parties had to use bulldozers to shovel them into mass graves. The graves are on the edge of town, a series of big, slightly misshapen mounds, each holding a couple of hundred bodies, covered in lush, tall grass and abundant thistles.

In 1990 the troops returned to dynamite the buildings. On March 18, 1991, the *pesh merga* took back the city. When I visited it in late April, it was for the first time in three years home to more living people than dead. At least 6,000 were camping out in the shattered hulls of the city's one-story houses, and in tents and lean-tos among them. The central market area was alive with the buzz of hustle among the ruins.

On one corner a butcher whacked great hunks from a freshly skinned sheep hung from a tripod of poplar branches. On another, a barber had set up a rickety chair and a mirror in a shell of a storefront and was giving a close haircut to a small boy. A restaurant of sorts was selling an excellent chicken soup that the chef-proprietor brewed in a big pot suspended over the burning end of a log on which he sat and stirred. The owner of a battered minibus stood nearby bellowing his destination, and a boy trundled past him with a wheelbarrow of sticky, furry figs.

Down the street Dr. Fayak Muhammed, who lost his mother, brother, and sister in the attack, had returned and opened a clinic, where he was seeing 200 patients a day. I spent that night at Dr. Muhammed's house, which was one of the few in town still more or less intact. After a dinner of rice, bread, and tomatoes, the men sat around and drank tea and talked. The conversation was an incompatible mixture of yeasty hope and leaden worry. One young man, a writer of the school of magic realism, who had written two (unpublished) anti-Saddam novels, talked of the mimeographed newspaper *Freedom*, which he had put out in the brief period the rebels held Sulaimaniya. "I wrote about the important things," he said. "The function of censors in a fascist structure and the nature of democracy and the meaning of totalitarianism. We published one issue, maybe 300, 400 copies."

All of which—the young men and their shining bandoliers, the fine talk, and the real strength of the *pesh merga*—raises a question. If things are so full of promise, why did the Kurds agree to sit down and bargain

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with Saddam? The answer is that apart from the military situation, things are terrifyingly bad.

There are, Kurdish leaders say with perhaps some hyperbole, 3 million refugees scattered in the border areas. At least several hundred thousand are within Iraq's borders. These are not the poor, huddled masses you saw on television. Those are the luckier, or stronger, ones who were able to make the trek all the way to Turkey or Iran. These wretched souls are the ones who couldn't or wouldn't make the exodus. They have almost no food or medicine. They live in filth and hunger and misery. There are too many of them crowded together with too few toilets, which has contaminated the usually good mountain water. Diarrhea diseases are epidemic. "You may say, at this point, that everyone has diarrhea," said Dr. Muhammed. As if to prove him right, the next day I got it myself, and learned why the few doctors of Kurdistan are afraid they could lose half the children if more medical help does not arrive before the full heat of summer.

It was a remarkably fast and violent sickness. In the morning, the first faint flutterings in the stomach; six hours later, ceaseless diarrhea and a 103-degree fever. The next afternoon I found a *pesh merga* doctor who hooked me up to an intravenous drip for four hours to rehydrate me and gave me the course of antibiotics that would soon cripple the amoeba enough to allow me to function. The doctor was Talibani's own, which is why he had such things as saline and antibiotics. Ordinary doctors, such as Fayak Muhammed, had run out weeks before.

Those without such good treatment may easily die of dehydration. The sickness makes it impossible to retain any fluids. One day, walking up a dirt road near Penjwan, I came upon a ten- or eleven-year-old boy lying in the dust, barely conscious. His face was burning hot, and thick ropes of mucus ran from his nostrils. He lay with his head turned to the side and his feet splayed outward, and he could not move. When we lifted his head and tried to pour water in his mouth, he stared uncomprehendingly and let the liquid dribble from the corners of his cracked lips. A medical student, the closest thing to a doctor in that place, flagged down a passing pickup and we laid the boy in the back, for a twenty-mile trip to a *pesh merga* clinic. "But there won't be much they can do for him there," the student said. "They have nothing to give him."

There was plenty of food available, but here, as elsewhere in Kurdish Iraq, it is too expensive for many families. At the stands along the road in Penjwan, a can of Isomil powdered milk costs three dinars; a kilo of rice or flour, two. The average Iraqi salary in the wake of the war is between six and eight dinars per day. These deadly circumstances dictate the position of the Kurdish leaders. They are willing to talk terms with Saddam because they have no other choice if they wish to get their people back into their homes and avoid mass casualties from hunger and disease. "At this point the only thing that is important is the survival of 3 million refugees," said Talibani. "We are facing the biggest catastrophe in our history."

The Iraqi regime likewise cannot afford not to talk. Saddam can't get away with keeping the dispirited remnants of his army indefinitely stuck on police duty surrounded by well-armed young men eager to shoot them. A German photographer who managed to sneak in and out of Sulaimaniya a few weeks ago says he found Iraqi troops eager to talk to him, and to tell everyone how miserable they were, how much they want to go home, how tired they were of fighting. I interviewed three Iraqi army POWs in a *pesh merga* camp one day. "You tell Mr. Bush he must do something to get rid of this Saddam," said a lieutenant. "He must do something to help us all go back to our homes." He and his colleagues berated the United States for calling off the ground war before destroying all of Saddam's military machine. But more fighting would have meant a great many more deaths of Iraqi soldiers, I said. "Yes," said one of the men. "Kill 10,000, 20,000. Fine. It is worth it as long as Saddam is dead too."

And here, of course, is the problem in the precarious equation of power in Kurdistan. It can exist as it is, or be tipped one way or the other, only by the actions of the most powerful force in Iraq these days, the U.S. armed forces. The United States might prefer the United Nations fulfill this role. The Kurds, who would just as soon possess the only army around, would prefer this too. But Iraq has rejected a U.N. peacekeeping force in Kurdistan. And the United States is already the de facto cop on the beat, holding territory fifty miles deep inside northern Iraq in a 3,600-square-mile "security zone."

The point of the zone is to make the refugees feel secure, thus enticing them home. But it only covers the area along the Turkish-Iraq border and does not protect the many more refugees on both sides of the Iran-Iraq border. The Kurds want a larger zone, as the United States found out in Dahuk. This undestroyed city is roughly sixty miles from the Turkish border. Secured, it would serve, the U.S. planners decided, as a magnet to attract 200,000 refugees home. But the Iraqis, already pushed out of the cities of Zakho and Amadiy, dug in the heels of 1,000 troops. The United States suggested a compromise that would allow the Iraqis to stay in Dahuk and keep U.S. forces out, while protecting the returning refugees with a force that might include U.N. troops and *pesh merga* fighters. The Kurds said that wasn't good enough.

Things will probably work out in some stopgap fashion, because everyone wants it to. Saddam and the Kurds want to sign a truce. The Iraqi army doesn't ever want to fight American troops again. Everybody wants the Kurds to go home. But working it out is going to mean, at least in the immediate future, the presence of an armed third party strong enough to handle both groups of men with guns. If I were an American soldier stationed in Zakho, I'd be planning on celebrating my Labor Day the Kurdish way. ●

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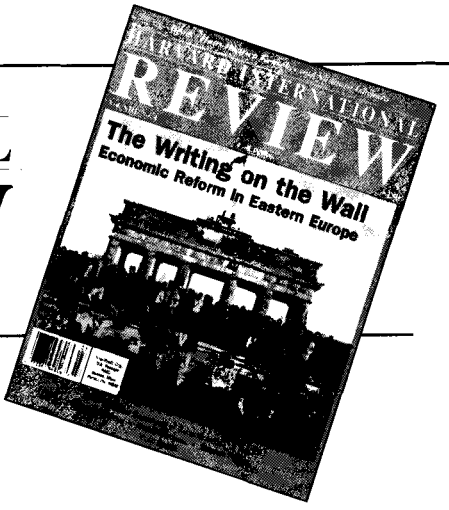

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

A Woman's Life

Last year, reviewing Jane Campion's *Sweetie*, I said, "If Campion can accept that we now know about her [pictorial] eye and can concentrate on an integrated story, she might make a good traditional filmmaker." She hadn't waited for my advice: she was already almost finished with **Angel at My Table** (Fine Line), which is traditional in approach, which employs her eye to present a narrative, and which is good.

Angel at My Table is a two-and-a-half-hour distillation, by the screenwriter Laura Jones, of Janet Frame's three volumes of autobiography. (The books are now available in one paperbound volume from George Braziller.) The film calls itself a trilogy, with one section devoted to each volume. For those who haven't read the books, the story may be surprising. We know that Frame is an eminent writer, and we know that she will move from ordinary beginnings to recognition and success. But we are not prepared for much of the dark texture that intervenes or for the odd, almost cheery tone in which even the worst moments are couched.

Frame (b. 1924) is one of the five children of a New Zealand railway worker and his hearty wife. Her childhood included the usual momentous initiations into the world but also into a world beyond the visible and tangible, disclosed to her by imagination. Early on, she discovered that she liked to write and that she was shy. This shyness apparently had something to do with the fact that she was chunkily built, had a large mop of frizzy red hair, and had curious teeth.

When she was quite young, a sister drowned. (Ten years later, another sister drowned.) As a young teacher, she became stressed and depressed and made a feeble (aspirin) attempt at suicide. She was taken to a mental hospital, falsely diagnosed as schizophrenic, and was given electric shock therapy. In and out of hospitals, she was given 200 shock treatments in the next eight years—during which she also published a book of stories and won a prize.

With a travel grant, she went to London. She soon fell into a consciously arty set, who were somewhat nettled to find that this provincial had already published a book and had another forthcoming. She then went to Ibiza (along the way, her teeth were fixed), continued to write fiction and poetry, had her first sexual experience, returned to London where the diagnosis of schizophrenia was ruled false, then went home to New Zealand where she lives and writes. (To date, eleven novels, four story collections, a volume of poetry, and a children's book.)

The first part of the film is the fullest because childhood, though hardly simple, is simpler than what comes after. In the second and third parts, even those who don't know the books may sense synoptic touches. But Jones's screenplay, as treated by Campion, does the essential: it captures the straightforward, fresh tone.

For Frame's autobiography is suffused with appetite, with openness, even when she is beset by peculiar people, peculiar diagnoses, peculiar emotions. She is like an especially patient Candide, forging ahead with mixed purpose and acceptance, with ego (who could be a writer without ego?) but with wonder. The film understands all this.

Campion's prime and perfect move was in the casting of the three Janets: the child, Alexia Keogh, the adolescent, Karen Fergusson, and the young woman, Kerry Fox. Each of them has a third of the picture. That Campion was able to find three people with physical resemblances to one another and to Frame was possibly only good luck, though makeup and costuming doubtless helped. But, more important, what Campion achieved with her three Janets was a continuity of presence and person, of temperament: a manner of walking, of posture, of gesture, and, fundamentally, a continuity of inner self. The woman who has her first sexual experience in Ibiza is related to the child who, at the family dinner table, innocently uses a naughty word that a school chum taught her.

Everyone else in the cast helps substantially. The casting and behavior of the child's schoolteachers evoke time and place. K. J. Wilson is her sturdy father; Iris Churn is an Erda-like mother. David Letch dabs in a vivid sketch of Janet's Irish landlord in London, who is smitten with her. William Brandt is amusingly serious as her American lover in Ibiza. The score by Don McGlashan has a nice folk feeling, varied with a few uses of Schubert's "An die Musik," which enraptured Janet at first hearing.

Campion's previous film was burdened with precious camera work—high angles, low angles, weird vantage points.

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The Comfort of Strangers. *Harold Pinter's screenplay (from Ian McEwan's novel) is eerily fascinating, even if finally imperfect. This Eros-Thanatos story, set in Venice, is deftly directed by Paul Schrader and is excellently acted. (Reviewed 4/29/91)* **Journey of Hope.** *A stark modern epic of a Turkish farmer, his wife and child, as they try to slip (illegally) into Switzerland. Haunting. (5/13/91)* **Requiem for Dominic.** *An almost incredible re-creation of an episode in the Romanian revolution, 1989. A dead man's name is cleared, and the cruelties of revolution are well dramatized. (5/20/91)* **Truly, Madly, Deeply.** *For connoisseurs of acting. This British story is slushy, but the acting of Juliet Stevenson and others is reward in itself. (5/27/91)* —**SK**

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Not one bit of that is evident here. She was so concerned with her subject that she forgot about self-display and put her (considerable) pictorial skill at the service of Janet Frame. Oh, there are a couple of shots of a distant train chugging along past a sunset, but those are negligible if only because they are commonplace. Campion is so responsive to the currents of humanity in this story that she has found the exactly right general locus for her camera—close without close-ups. The camera is attentive, not intrusive.

The cinematography by Stuart Dryburgh adds something else, particularly in the first section—a homely grubbiness. At first it seems like inadequate color, a bit runny, or like slightly undefined focus; but soon it's apparent that Campion and Dryburgh want to suggest a social milieu, crowded, congenial, warmly though somewhat shabbily dressed. From the photography alone, we get some sense of what life is like for this segment of New Zealand society, getting the best out of what they had, in their pullovers and plain dresses, at close quarters.

Angel at My Table (it's the title of the second of Frame's three volumes) is not often exciting or deeply moving. It's simply interesting. Two qualities distinguish it. First, one female artist of a particular culture wanted to present the life of another female artist of that culture. I don't think it's wisdom after the event to say that certain bonds of sisterly sympathy are manifest throughout, certain avenues of understanding. (There's a cousinly relationship with *My Brilliant Career,* an Australian woman's film from an autobiographical novel by an Australian woman.) Second, the purpose here is to recount a life, rather than to create a drama. This was probably not a fresh film idea when Mark Donskoy made his *Gorky* trilogy (1938-40). Still, there is something full-souled about the venture, something respectful of the human enterprise as a whole and of art as its adjunct.

In any case, Campion has moved forward healthily. More, please. ●

The Professor of Desire

BY ALAN WOLFE

Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis by Norman O. Brown

(University of California Press, 209 pp., $22.50)

Love's Body by Norman O. Brown

(University of California Press, 276 pp., $35, $10.95 paper)

Norman O. Brown, writing in America in the 1950s rather than France in the 1970s, anticipated nearly all the themes that now dominate literary and cultural studies in the United States. Rarely has a thinker been so right in foreseeing so much that is so wrong.

For the student of rebellion against "uptight" disciplines, Norman O. Brown offered, along with Herbert Marcuse, an irresistible combination of the familiar and the exotic. The names were the same, starting with Plato and ending after Freud, but the concepts were very different: repressive desublimation, the death instinct, the excremental vision, one-dimensional man, repressive tolerance. (These terms accomplished their mission of giving new meaning to Hegel's "unhappy consciousness.") Both Marcuse and Brown, but especially Brown, took their readers into the underground of social theory, introducing them to thinkers whose ideas were consciously or unconsciously repressed, it was said, by the anality of bourgeois culture.

Marcuse and Brown seemed to operate by a division of intellectual labor that corresponded to a division in the New Left. The anti-war demonstrations had their political activists intent on organizing a mass movement against capitalism and their drug-taking hippies interested in Nirvana. Marcuse was understood to be talking the language of the former and Brown the language of the latter. Marcuse was politics, Brown was myth. Marcuse was a product of the Frankfurt School, worked in the Office of Strategic Services during the war, and self-

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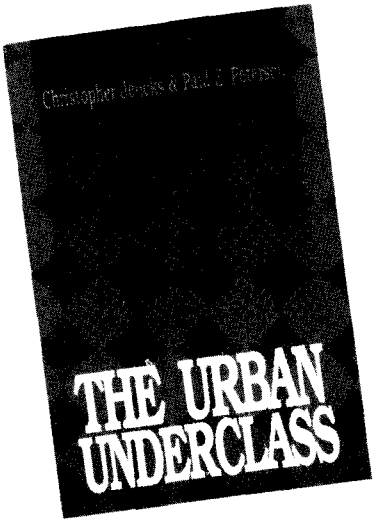

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consciously identified with some of the political "heavies" among the younger generation. Brown was the poet and the mystic. "For the reality of politics, we must turn to the poets, not to the politicians," he wrote in *Love's Body*, his famous manifesto of 1966, which has now been reissued. Brown was more likely to write about Blake and Yeats than about Hegel and Marx. His favorite philosopher was Spinoza. Islam and Buddhism occupied as much space in his books as Protestantism and Judaism. Reading Brown was a little like taking drugs, only it was more likely to lead to tenure.

Now that the dust of the '60s has settled, it is Brown, oddly enough, who has left the stronger impression. Followers of the Frankfurt School tradition split into many camps, with little in common except a lack of interest in Marcuse. Brown, however, still has his followers. Christopher Lasch, who wrote the introduction to the second edition of *Life Against Death*, cites Brown (and Marcuse) as major influences in *The True and Only Heaven*. And throughout the United States, but especially in California, students of "consciousness" turn frequently to Brown to ponder its mysteries.

The irony, though, is that Brown has outlasted Marcuse precisely because he was *not* more mystical and less political. Finally, Brown is as "political" a thinker as Marcuse. And Brown's politics, understood as politics and not as poetry, raise the disturbing question of whether a certain kind of attack on the thinness of liberal culture inevitably leads to an authoritarianism prettified by the impression of organic wholeness.

Brown himself was clear about the political origins of his theoretical speculations. "My first historical identity, my Marxist ideology, was wrecked in the frozen landscape of the cold war, the defeat of the simplistic hopes for a better world that inspired the Henry Wallace campaign for the presidency in 1948," he told a California conference on the humanities in 1989. But unlike many of his generation who turned from Marxism to liberalism, Brown turned from Marxism to psychoanalysis. His concern would be the body, not the body politic.

But bodies are what bodies politic rule. Brown understands this, and invariably he shifts his attention from the one to the other. His goal is "the resurrection of the body; but not the separate body of the individual, but the body of mankind as one body." Psychoanalysis, in his hands, is a cure not for lost souls, but for misdirected societies. "I wagered my intellectual life on the idea of finding in Freud what was missing in Marx," Brown wrote in 1990. But this is not correct. It was what he did *not* find in Freud that inspired him. Freud, for most of his life, was a doctor concerned with individual patients. Only toward the end of his life did he begin to speculate about *die Massen*, the collective person that absorbs and renders irrelevant individual persons and their dreams, desires, and fantasies. Brown aspired to complete the group psychology that Freud never finished.

Reflecting his belief in the primacy of political theory, Brown began *Love's Body* with a discussion of Locke. (The book's first chapter is called "Liberty.") For Brown, as for Locke, the signifying fact of modern political life is the overthrow of feudalism, with its rigid system of orders and obligations. But whereas Locke, like other liberal thinkers such as Jefferson and Madison, finds in different estates and factions a protection against arbitrary authority, Brown believes that the struggle against authority is illusory. Just as the infant seeks to crawl back into the mother's womb, just as the son engages in a futile rebellion against the father, modern people delude themselves if they believe they can lead lives premised on the assumption of individual autonomy.

Leaving the state of nature, Brown is saying, was our original mistake. Liberal political theorists were not unaware of the terrors involved in so radical an act, for they tended, with the exception of Hobbes, to portray the state of nature as a rather pleasant place. And the resulting artificiality of society was not always an improvement, as Rousseau would maintain. Still, artifice is creative, and what it creates is culture. In this sense, liberalism is a theory of the necessity of artificial culture, a way of understanding that if we are to live with the terrors of separation, we need to find a way to make modern life bearable.

Liberal social theorists, strongly influenced by the rise of sociology, found two answers to the riddle of modern alienation, both of which are rejected by Brown. The first was the group. If we understand individuals as bound to families, communities, ethnic enclaves, and associations, we can accept separation unblinkingly as our condition, and help to draw the entrance rules, exit rules, and rites of passage that make it possible for mobile agents to move from one to the other. (The term generally given by liberals to this strategy is pluralism.) Such a task leads inevitably into discussions of boundaries, classifications, and exclusions. Any theory of group membership is a theory of exclusion. Its concern with community, ethnicity, particularity, norms, and customs is all a way of talking about the need to keep some in and others out.

For Brown, however, boundaries are the very essence of what is wrong with modernity. This begins with the boundary between the self and the external world, a distinction made only "in the lunatic state called normalcy or common sense." That boundary, like all boundaries, is "an artificial construction . . . not natural, but conventional . . . based on love and hate." Reality is not a spatial concept, to be found in places. It is, rather, energy or instinct. To separate, therefore, is to destroy. "A social order based on the reality principle, a social order which draws a distinction between the wish and the deed, between the criminal and the righteous, is still a kingdom of darkness." Psychoanalysis as social therapy can help modern liberals overcome the boundaries that separate them. "The conclusion of the whole matter is, break down the boundaries, the walls. Down with defense mechanisms, character-armor; disarmament."

The second sociological discovery that offered a solution to the loneliness in liberal society was an emphasis on the common representations and customs that override boundaries. Most famously, Durkheim stressed the importance of collective representations in strengthening the moral solidarity of a society, although he was also (a sure sign of sociology's ambivalence) a pluralist fascinated with classification. Collective representations take many forms, but from the time of Durkheim and the simultaneous discovery of anthropology, the most important of these has been understood to be culture.

What makes Brown different is not his distaste for boundaries; division is usually dismissed by those who prefer union. It is that he couples his organicism with an attack on the one form that organic unity generally takes in modern society: the cultural. Culture—"our ingeniously developed limitations," as Phillip Rieff defines it—makes order possible, by preventing us from satisfying our drives at once by providing substitute gratification. In Rieff's words, "Every culture is so constituted that there are actions one cannot perform; more precisely, would dread to perform. . . . Sociology has not paid enough attention to what is not done, to the closed possibilities, to the negatives, the suppressed."

Brown knows and respects Rieff. (He met him at Herbert Marcuse's wedding.) But Brown understands that although boundaries divide and culture unites,

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both repress; and he will have none of repression. Culture, in Brown's view, can never provide the unity that was lost with the transition from feudalism to liberal democracy. In *Life Against Death*, first published in 1959, Brown wrote that "there is an essential connection between being sick and being civilized," a Freudian theme that he never abandoned. "The entirety of culture is projection," he argued. "Man in culture, *Homo sublimans*, is man dreaming while awake." Culture is the tactic by which an ever more serious Oedipal complex is projected into the external world, "one vast arena in which the logic of the transference works itself out." Culture is thus an illusion created by people to avoid the terror (and the joy) of contemplating death. When man left nature for culture, he sacrificed organic unity for an illusion of mastery.

Skeptics about culture generally insist instead on the rights of the person against the collectivity. The hostility that Brown shows (with Marcuse) toward culture has led Nancy Chodorow, in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, to find an element of radical individualism in the thought of both men. But she is a little off the mark. Brown is as hostile to individualism, the key tenet of liberal political theory, as he is to culture. "There is no integration of the separate individual," he wrote in *Love's Body*. Since individuals understood as the bearers of abstract rights can live only in culture, and since culture is artificial, then individuals are artificial as well. "A person is always a feigned or artificial person, *persona ficta*. A person is never himself but always a mask; a person never owns his own person, but always represents another, by whom he is possessed. And the other that one is, is always ancestors; one's soul is never one's own but daddy's. This is the meaning of the Oedipus Complex." It follows that every aspect of liberal theory entailed by the notion of individualism—rights, constitutions, privacy, property—is suspect. "The Western legal fiction, with its fetishism (personification) of property, its reification of persons, eliminates the facts more completely, by eliminating the moment of truth, the interregnum, the search for the new incarnations."

Still, Chodorow is right to emphasize Brown's individualism, so long as we understand that it is not real, flesh-and-blood people whose rights he is defending, but the individual as larger-than-life hero. Brown's attack on culture was a perfect product of the Eisenhower years, a time when it was de rigueur to believe that mass society (if not fascism) had ar-

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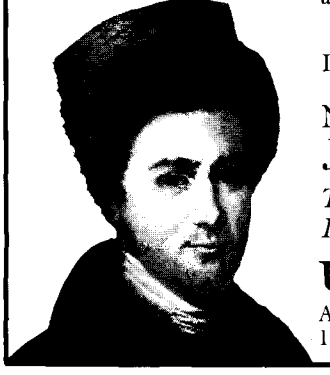

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rived in the form of suburban tract housing. (Recall that Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* contained a chapter on the home called "Progressive Dehumanization: The Comfortable Concentration Camp.") The radicalism born in the 1950s thought of itself as leftist, but its cultural criticism owed much to Gustav LeBon, José Ortega y Gasset, Wilhelm Reich, and other anti-democratic theorists. Those who nodded knowingly at Malvina Reynolds's astonishingly arrogant dismissal of "little houses . . . made of ticky-tacky" were individualists who detested the lives of real individuals.

The Brown-and-Marcuse treatment of culture enabled the social critic to reject liberal individualism and group obligations simultaneously, when most political theories argued for one at the expense of the other. Just as Marxism avoided the nitty-gritty details of how real societies worked in favor of a utopian vision of society without the division of labor, so Brown could ignore how real individuals thought and behaved in favor of a utopian individualism that only Nietzschean supermen could achieve. If Brown is an individualist, his form of individualism has much in common with the liberalism that he rejects, for the abstract calculator of utilitarianism is fully as distant from the real life experience of ordinary people as the mythic whole person of radical Freudianism.

One sees the same contempt for real people that characterizes Brown's cultural radicalism in his discussion of economics. All economic theory, Brown argues, even Marx's *Kapital*, is premised on an elevation of the reality principle over the pleasure principle. "The prudential calculating character (the ideal type of *Homo economicus*) is an anal character." Like Freud, Brown understands economics through excrement. "What the elegant laws of supply and demand really describe is the antics of an animal which has confused excrement with aliment and does not know it, and which, like infantile sexuality, pursues no 'real aim.' " Capitalism "has made us so stupid and one-sided that objects exist for us only if we can possess them or if they have utility." Individuals living under such conditions are thus unable "to distinguish real human needs from (neurotic) consumer demands." (Here again Brown's thoughts bring to mind social critics of the 1950s like Vance Packard and Philip Wylie.) Economics cannot be a real science, and market economics cannot be made whole, until those who study the former and those who live in the latter get in touch with death.

Much of Brown's work can be read as a commentary on Weber's well-known linkage of individualism, liberalism, and capitalism. The Protestant ethic, according to Brown, began on a toilet—on Luther's toilet, to be precise. There is "some mysterious intrinsic connection between the Protestant illumination and the privy." For Brown, the link between them is the devil. Both Protestantism and capitalism are engaged in an anal effort to deny the diabolic. The concept of *Beruf*, the innerworldly asceticism that, according to Weber, drives the Puritan to accumulate, is best understood, Brown argues, as a coming to terms with the trickster Satan. "The inner voice, the personal salvation, the private experience are all based on an illusory distinction," he wrote in *Love's Body*. Such Weberian terms as "personality" and "character" are irrelevant to an understanding of the dynamics of liberal capitalism. Neither is innate. "A man's character is his *demon*, his tutelar spirit; received as a dream." Personality is likewise "acquired. Like a mask, it is a thing, a fe-

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tish, a fetishistic object or commodity."

For Brown, liberalism and literalism are the same; and Protestantism gave rise to both. *Love's Body*, like current literary theory, believes that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." Brown launches an extended (and very unoriginal) attack on intentionalism, the belief that the meaning of a text lies in what the text's author intended. Textual criticism, "part of the search for the one true and literal meaning," is, according to Brown, a effort "to establish the text, *die feste Schrift*, a mighty fortress; the authoritative text." Liberal societies govern themselves by authoritative texts; of all political arrangements ever invented, liberalism is a product of the book. But Brown distrusts authors and authority. He envisions a politics governed not by words on a page, but by spirits in the air. Once we learn to think in symbols as opposed to words, that "would be the end of the Protestant era, the end of Protestant liberalism."

Brown is finally a political writer because all his readings—of poems, of scriptures, of the unconscious—are directed at the failings of liberal political theory. He prefers romanticism to liberalism. But his intellectual history is sloppy. Much as he abhors separations, he is not above committing them himself. From Brown you will not learn, for example, that some of the most interesting thinkers of modernity have pursued the promise of what Nancy Rosenblum has called "another liberalism," by attempting to reconcile the romantic heart with the liberal head. Brown tendentiously pulls apart what Wordsworth and Thoreau boldly tried to link together.

"Jeremiads are useless unless we can point to a better way," Brown concluded at the end of *Life Against Death*. And the better way, lest there be any doubt, is political perfection, not individual salvation:

> The resurrection of the body is a social project facing mankind as a whole, and it will become a practical political problem when the statesmen of the world are called upon to deliver happiness instead of power, when political economy becomes a science of use-values instead of exchange values—a science of enjoyment instead of a science of accumulation.

Brown, whatever else he is, is an American. The story must have an end, the end must be happy, and we will reach the end through transcendental reformation.

The title of Brown's new collection of essays, *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*, gives its message. We change or we crash. There is a good argument for crash. After all, a focus on filth, repression, sin, death, and illusion would seem to lead to

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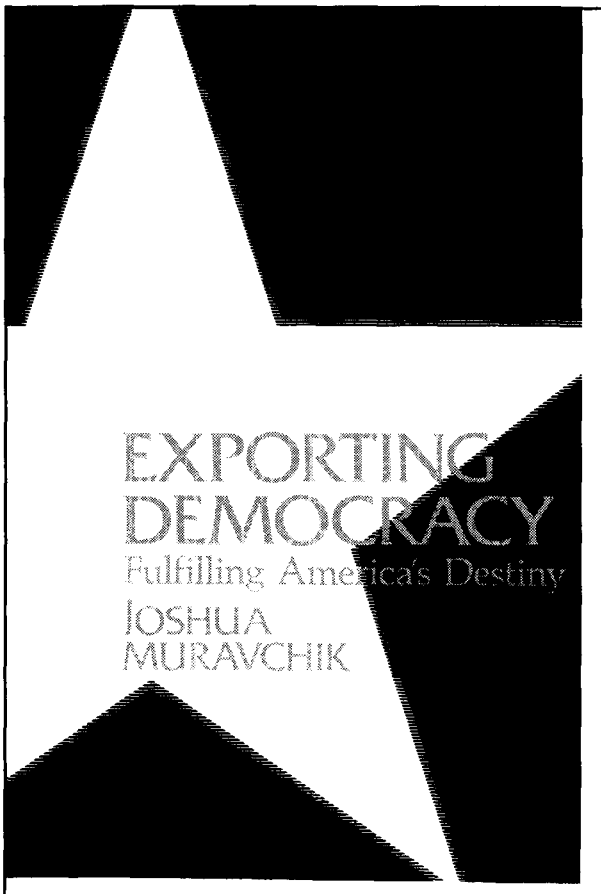

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damnation: not all jeremiads point to a better way. But Brown is also the theorist of love, eros, food, wholeness, and liberation. Change, radical change, is possible and necessary. "Overcoming the world; overthrowing the government; overthrowing the government of the reality-principle, which is the prince of darkness, the ruler of the darkness of this world." The messiah (or Lefty) has not come, but he is coming.

It was a noted characteristic of popular front literature to end every novel or propaganda piece with a call to action. No matter how rotten capitalism is, we were exhorted, there was always a way out. Brown's turn from politics to collective psychology in no way suggests a rethinking of the obligatory "Where Do We Go From Here" chapter. But in offering a way out, Brown's radical and occasionally illuminating imagery gives way to tired predictability. He becomes a philosopher of utility rather than an advocate of uselessness. The worship of life replaces the consciousness of death. Closure is valued over ambiguity. The reality principle is suddenly to be welcomed, even if the reality is a future utopia and not a present condition. Otherworldly asceticism is transformed into inner-worldly achievement, into what Talcott Parsons called "goal attainment." But most important of all, Brown's acceptance of resurrection suggests that for all the post-Marxism inspired by failure of the Wallace campaign in 1948, he never left behind the Marxist faith in the saving power of a saintly class. It is not the proletariat, however, but the collective libido. "Where id was, there ego shall be," Freud wrote of the psychoanalytic cure. Brown reverses the dictum. Where the self was, there our collective unrestrained drives will be.

Faith that a revolutionary class will overcome the contradictions of capitalism led Marx and many Marxists into double standards and sloppy thinking, and much the same occurs with Brown. Determined to prove that there are other ways than Western rationality, Brown overlooks the flaws of the thinkers he admires and offers peculiar interpretations of the civilizations he would have us emulate. Islam, for example, is upheld as one way out. Islam rejects the Trinity. Its tradition of sacrifice is "commemorative and eucharistic, not expiatory." Islam does not accept the world as it is; its culture posits a radical break between literal meaning and mystery. "The Koran breaks decisively with that alliance between the prophetic tradition and materialistic historicism—'what actually happened'—which set in with the materialistic historical triumph of Christianity." This is merely left-wing Orientalism, the mirror image of the colonialists who found in Islam coarseness and violence. Like them, he is really writing about the West, finding in the exotic a foil for the emptiness of northern California.

If Islam provided an alternative as a mass movement, Spinoza provides an alternative philosophy, which also involves "the search for an adequate theory of mass politics." "Spinoza," Brown writes, "is effecting a conjunction between prophetic history and the most advanced speculations of contemporary republicanism, based on classical political theory as modernized by Machiavelli." Brown argues that Spinoza is "the philosopher of the future" because he saw the problems of the modern liberal isolate before he came into existence. It is therefore incorrect to interpret Spinoza as a mystic; he should be understood politically. His objective was to find an alternative to the liberal individualist self in the mystical body called God. As a critic of bourgeois liberalism, therefore, Spinoza stands first in the line of dissent that continued with Marx, Nietzsche, Freud—and Brown. Spinoza set "the historical agenda for us today: to rectify the flaw in modernity; to arrive at one world, to reorganize the gigantic material processes of intercommunication released by modernity into a coherent unity; call it Love's Body."

Whether or not Brown's reading of Spinoza is correct, we must beware a too literal application of premodern ideas to the modern condition. Spinoza could not know the horrors that would follow when political leaders sought the salvation of souls. But Brown does. Here is the advice that he discovers in Spinoza: "It is the task of the intellect to remove the doubt, to straighten out the confusion, to remove the ambivalence, to make a more perfect union, to make it all cohere." Spinoza is Brown's 1990 model of the 1948 Wallace, the car that drives us (we never drive it) into the future.

This longing for a political form of Love's Body is the one constant in Brown's thought over three decades. One of his essays on Spinoza begins with the story of how this philosopher became a sudden celebrity for Louis Althusser and his followers, such as Etienne Balibar, who once found the unified body in Mao; and the "quantitative leap" in the rediscovery of this Spinoza came about when Antonio Negri, a philosopher sitting in prison because Italian authorities believed him responsible for the violence of the Red Brigades, published a book on the subject. (It has recently appeared in English as *The Savage Anomaly. The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics.*) In such hands, Spinoza's longing for an otherworldly unity, translated into a this-worldly solution for the thinness of modern liberalism, comes out communist—a reading that even Brown admits is "not easy." It is a little chilling to reflect that the "the turn to Spinoza" should be most pronounced among those who find Marxism insufficiently totalistic.

In his very latest writings and speeches, Brown demonstrates that he has not lost the faith. In 1990 Brown detects in the revolutions of Eastern and Central Europe a "Dionysian consciousness." Thrilled by images of people rebelling against unjust authority, Brown hopes that "soon, very soon ... the whole world will join in the dance." (Brown likes the side of Vaclav Havel that likes Frank Zappa.) In fine Marxist fashion, Brown finds universality to sustain himself through hard times. Dionysus is in all of us; if we can all be frenzied, we can all be free. His book ends with a celebration of "that heroical frenzy which was the life of Giordano Vruno; or Jimi Hendrix." And this means that we must "discard the pseudo-scientific posture of clinical detachment or political rationality, and recognize madness as the universal human condition, not the distinctive stigma of a separate class distinguished as insane." Perfect equality is under the sign of Bedlam.

There is an uncomfortable question lurking behind Brown's thought. Is there, after all, no alternative to liberalism? Liberalism, for all its political success in the world, has had few friends among intellectuals. And, truth be told, it has not tried all that hard to make friends. Bentham and Mill all too often went out of their way to make their thought unattractive to all but the logical. The coldness of liberalism, its lack of interest in the heart, its indifference to community, is an old complaint. For the generation of the 1960s, certainly, every political movement was a movement against liberalism. So deep was the resentment against liberalism that even now, three decades later, a 50-year-old liberal intellectual is hard to find.

Rereading Norman O. Brown, however, is enough to turn the most sentimental communitarian into the least sentimental liberal. For in his work the emphasis on unity becomes so all-absorbing that all human institutions and practices disappear. Brown's community is neither the classical *fraternité* of revolutionary France nor the close-knit

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ethnic enclaves recently admired by Lasch. Division began, for Brown, when man was divided from his collective unconscious; and intentional communities—those efforts by individuals to define for themselves the identities that will move them—only take us further away from "that immortal sea which brought us hither." The best for which we can hope are "imitations" of real organic unity, which "are given in moments of 'oceanic feeling'; one sea of energy or instinct; embracing all mankind, without distinction of race, language, or culture; and embracing all the generations of Adam, past, present, and future, in one phylogenetic heritage, in one mystical or symbolical body."

The political agenda with which *Love's Body* begins is there at that end: "Every throne a toilet seat, and every toilet seat a throne." Brown, in sum, is anything but mystical, for he will not leave the profane world alone. Indeed, the profane world is where he prefers to focus his glance. And in that world Brown allows no retreat from the demand for unity. "Psychoanalysis is that revolving state which completes this revolution, disclosing the bedroom and the bathroom behind the bourgeois facade, disclosing the obscenity of the onstage scene, abolishing the reality-principle and its unreal distinction between public and private, between head and genital." This is over the top. Even Marcuse, who rarely met a Dionysian he didn't like, warned of the danger of unity worship. Indeed, his first article in *Commentary* (those were the days!) was a review of *Love's Body*, in which he rightly pointed out that "fulfillment becomes meaningless if everything is one, and one is everything."

It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that Brown, like some deconstructionists, should have a bit of a problem with authoritarianism. Those who distrust authority are frequently authoritarians. Brown never wrote anti-Semitic articles for fascist newspapers, but he does admit that the Dionysian brew that intoxicates him can be discerned not only in the romanticism of Blake, but also "in the upheavals of modern history—in the sexology of de Sade and the politics of Hitler. . . ." The worship of irrationality that led Georges Sorel, Georges Bataille, and Wilhelm Reich into the far corners of right-wing politics is no reason, from Brown's perspective, to abandon the worship. Whereas modernist literary critics loved Ezra Pound's poetry in spite of his fascist politics, Brown pays serious attention to Pound's periodical *The Exile*, published from 1927 to 1928. Brown recognizes the "elitist pretension, the fascist potential" in Pound's attack on mass cultures; yet he writes, "Pound's impudent candor makes me think twice before dismissing the thought because it is fascist." Lowered from its mystical heights to the real world of twentieth-century politics, love's body looks suspiciously like a police state.

Liberalism's weak point has always been its psychology. Real world people—moved by love, envy, altruism, egoism, conformity, heroism—are both more interesting and less interesting than the liberal image of self-reliant, rationally calculating utilitarians. Brown, sensing this vulnerability, would replace the simplistic psychological theory of economic man with the seductive wholeness of post-Freudian man. Yet anyone who believes, as Brown does, that "the self does not belong to its possessor" is unlikely to develop a satisfactory psychology either. People are neither atomistic isolates nor submerged in oceanic oneness. There is, finally, little difference between those who attribute everything to individuals and those who attribute nothing. Real individuals will go on trying to find ways to be true to themselves and true to others simultaneously.

"Freedom is violence," Brown writes. But it is not. It is, rather, the condition of character that enables morally and economically secure individuals to avoid violence, both the violence of others in the market and the violence that is always embodied in the state. We left the state of nature to be free, and the best proof that we succeeded is the effort by so many writers, not least Norman O. Brown, to have us go back. For, if we do return to nature, it will be because we choose to do so. Even the return to nature is an act of free men and women.

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The Government Gap

BY JAMES Q. WILSON

Why Americans Hate Politics: The Death of the Democratic Process by E. J. Dionne Jr.

(Simon and Schuster, 430 pp., $22.95)

The United States of Ambition: Politicians, Power, and the Pursuit of Office by Alan Ehrenhalt

(Random House/Times Books, 309 pp., $23)

From around 1960 to around 1981, the confidence of the American people in the officials who ran the federal government declined. During the Reagan years, the decline was halted, and people became somewhat more trusting; but the improvement was modest, and it may have been short-lived. This growing mistrust of Washington politicians is often explained by the impact of Vietnam and Watergate. Those crises no doubt contributed to the problem, but they were not the cause of it.

The distrust of government increased sharply between 1964 and 1966, long before Watergate and well before public opinion turned clearly against our involvement in Southeast Asia. In that two-year span, the percentage of voters who said they trusted Washington to do the right thing "most of the time" fell from 62 percent to 48 percent. (The only other two-year period to reveal a comparably large decline was the Watergate years of 1972-74.) Between 1966 and 1968, when Vietnam was becoming a more divisive issue, owing partly to the erroneous perception that the United States had been defeated in the Tet offensive, public trust in government actually increased (from 48 to 54 percent). Moreover, the decline in trust continued after Watergate was behind us.

At the same time that Americans were losing confidence in people holding office, those offices were falling into the hands of rival parties. Divided govern-

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ment—a Republican president and a Democratic Congress—was no longer the exception, as it had been earlier in this century, it was the rule. Only three times in the last thirty years has a presidential election given one party (in all cases the Democrats) control of the White House and both houses of Congress. By contrast, twenty-two of twenty-six elections between 1900 and 1952 produced unified party control.

Many of the prevailing explanations for divided government also turn out, on close inspection, to be of little value. One explanation, popular among Republicans, is that gerrymandering has given the Democrats a lock on the House. But that cannot be true: throughout the last thirty years, more votes have been cast for Democrats than for Republicans for the House. Even the fairest districting system would have maintained the Democrats in power. Another explanation is that the legendary advantages of incumbency have worked to protect the party—specifically, the Democratic Party—that happened to be in power when incumbency became so powerful. But when there is an open seat in the House, that is, when there is no incumbent running for re-election, the Republicans don't do much better than when they run against Democratic incumbents.

It is always possible that the voters want divided government. Perhaps they wish to ensure that one party is able to check the other; or they may like Republican positions on "presidential issues" (for example, the economy or foreign policy) and Democratic positions on "congressional issues" (for example, the distribution of government services and benefits to the people). Morris Fiorina of Harvard and Gary Jacobson of the University of California, San Diego, have adduced some ingenious (though indirect) statistical evidence for each of these possibilities, but their findings are open to the obvious objection that it is hard to find any real, living voter who seems to be in favor of divided government. Quite the contrary: most voters complain of government gridlock and partisan bickering.

Now come two of this country's ablest political reporters to offer some new answers to these puzzles. E. J. Dionne Jr., formerly of *The New York Times* and now of *The Washington Post*, argues that Americans hate politics because the political elites—the chattering classes, as Anthony King calls them—have increasingly redefined politics in ideological terms that most voters find irrelevant to their real problems. There *is* a silent majority, says Dionne, but it is not the one that conservatives talk about. It is a centrist silent majority that is in agreement as to what this nation's real problems are, and possibly even in agreement as to what the solutions might be. Ideological politics, practiced by liberal and conservative activists, prevents this consensus from expressing itself in policy. The people, eager for real choices, are given false choices; anxious about the economy, the family, the school system, and crime, they are confronted by candidates intent on arguing over abortion, gun control, supply-side economics, and the Pledge of Allegiance. And so the people respond by turning their backs on the candidates and, alas, on the system.

Alan Ehrenhalt, for many years the political editor of *Congressional Quarterly* and now the editor of *Governing* magazine, suggests that divided government is not the result of gerrymandering, incumbent advantage, or voter preference, but of the kinds of people willing to offer credible campaigns for legislative posts. He notes that divided government is not unique to Washington, that it is characteristic of many states as well. The sight of Republican governors confronting Democratic state legislatures has become almost as commonplace as that of Republican presidents facing Democratic Congresses.

Ehrenhalt argues that this cannot be understood by looking simply at what voters demand. We must also consider what politicians supply. And what they have supplied, increasingly since the 1960s, has been a cadre of liberal Democrats eager for careers in elective office and skilled at mobilizing the most sophisticated and exhausting campaign tactics to win those offices. Ehrenhalt may well become known as the father of supply-side political science.

To make his case, he goes back to the grass roots and provides us with vivid portrayals of street-level politics in four cities (Concord, California; Sioux Falls, Iowa; Greenville, South Carolina; and Utica, New York) and four state legislatures (Wisconsin, Connecticut, Alabama, and Colorado). In each place, Ehrenhalt finds old-style politics as practiced by citizen legislators and party-oriented professionals giving way to new-style politics as practiced by full-time professionals, loyal not to parties or structures, but to themselves and their ideologies.

In some places it began with reformers replacing party bosses, as in Utica, Greenville, and the Connecticut legislature, but it did not stop there; and in many places it never began there. There were no party bosses to be ousted from the state legislatures of Wisconsin or Colorado. There were, instead, farmers, merchants, and insurance agents who viewed politics as a useful avocation and government as a limited institution. Being in the legislature might be good for business or for the ego, but the job didn't pay much. Since only a few people could afford to be in office, not many credible candidates ran for office. Elections were often settled by folksy, friends-and-neighbors appeals reinforced by endorsements from small-town newspapers and people in the chamber of commerce.

No more. State legislatures increasingly meet year-round, pay their members a decent wage, and provide them with a sizable staff. People not only can make a career out of local politics, they *must* make a career out of it: the demands on those who are elected, and the intense competition among those who seek election, has put politics beyond the reach of people who view it as a hobby.

Ehrenhalt argues that the people prepared to make even local politics a vocation rather than an avocation have been, since the 1960s, disproportionately liberal Democrats. As one Wisconsin state legislator told him, "The Republicans hate government. Why be here if you hate government? So they let us [liberal Democrats] run it for them." Or as another legislator put it, "There are some Republicans in my district who could run against me and make my life miserable. But the Republicans can't come up with candidates who will put in hundred-hour weeks. So they don't make it."

In this way Ehrenhalt explains an otherwise puzzling phenomenon: communities that vote regularly and heavily for Republican candidates for president and that once elected Republicans to their city councils and state legislatures now choose for these local offices liberal Democrats. The Democrats outhustle and outperform their Republican rivals: they are more energetic and sophisticated campaigners, and they deliver on bread-and-butter, neighborhood issues.

Once in office, moreover, they have a good deal of freedom to pursue a liberal political agenda, because voters are ignorant of, or indifferent to, efforts to enact comparable worth statutes or gay rights ordinances and are happy to have more environmental legislation, especially if it can be presented as part of a slow-growth plan. Sometimes the liberals overreach themselves, of course, and there is a backlash. Still, at the local level, as at the national level, voters tolerate a fairly wide range of legislative discretion, provided only that the legislators avoid scandal and respect the preferences of the people

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who voted for them on a few gut issues.

Supply-side politics, like supply-side economics, has a price: a political system that is open only to individual careerists who build personal followings is a system that will be lacking in any mechanisms to screen candidates, to build coalitions, or to hold leaders accountable. Power and leadership have been heavily diluted or have simply evaporated. Ehrenhalt is not in the grip of any romantic attachment to a golden age of machine politics, but he is surely right to ask this question: "Why is machine government a greater affront to democracy than a government of leaderless individualists prone to petty rivalry and endless bickering?" The people like politicians who are not beholden to anybody; but a politician who does not owe anybody a thing also does not have many tools with which to govern. Obligation is a two-way process: what I owe to an organization or leader (because it helped elect me) is also a claim I have on that organization and leader (because it must help me govern).

This suggests a link between Dionne's argument about ideological politics and Ehrenhalt's argument about careerist politics. Divided government need not lead to deadlocked government, and often it has not. Either mediating institutions will negotiate a settlement between the executive and legislative branches (as strong Democratic congressional leaders did in the Eisenhower administration, or as even stronger party leaders once did in Connecticut government) or politics will be driven by powerful ideas that sweep both branches before them (as happened with respect to tax reform and environmentalism).

But divided government in an era of individual careerists who are constantly running for re-election, and who are motivated to some significant degree by either personal ideology or the need to satisfy ideological elites who control campaign funds and party caucuses, is another matter. The legislative workload will increase as individual policy entrepreneurs attempt to advance their personal agendas and to take control of issues. Mediating institutions will lose influence, and collegiality will suffer. Political activists will become more deeply polarized as they watch government bend to the pressures of their ideological opponents. Citizens will watch the hubbub with growing dismay.

It is hard to imagine what, if anything, can be done about this. Setting maximum terms for legislators may increase the turnover among officeholders, but it will not change the kind of institution in which they operate or the processes by which they win elections. Ehrenhalt finds it impossible to justify on a rational basis the system that we now have, but he offers no alternatives to it.

Dionne does offer an alternative of sorts: an appeal to liberals and conservatives to alter the terms of public debate so that politics once again has something to do with what the public feels really matters. Only if ideological activists redirect politics away from symbolic issues can we avoid, in his opinion, a repetition of the presidential campaign of 1988, in which what passed for public debate centered on Willie Horton, the Pledge of Allegiance, and membership in the American Civil Liberties Union.

Many of Dionne's criticisms of liberalism and conservatism are telling. Liberalism became the province of upper-middle-class intellectuals and radicals who professed a desire to help ordinary citizens, but held in barely concealed contempt the most cherished values of those people—patriotism, religious conviction, and traditional sexual morality—and dismissed as misguided their central concerns—rising crime rates, deteriorating public schools, and foreign competition for local markets. Though the New Left was founded out of a desire to encourage participation, to decentralize decisions, and to expand opportunity, the left generally came to espouse programs that limited participation to those who could afford lawyers, that required more centralized decision-making by the federal government, and that limited equality of opportunity in the name of programs (goals, quotas, "diversity") that reflected a desire for equality of result.

Conservative intellectuals seized upon these liberal mistakes and laid the groundwork for a reassertion of conservative policies (tax cuts, market strategies, military strength) in the 1980s. But conservatism was better as a source of opposition to government than as a guide to it. The movement was an uneasy coalition of cultural conservatives who accepted government and were willing in some ways to see its powers enlarged, libertarians who opposed all government save the most minimal, supply-side economists who wanted tax cuts, and anti-Communists who wished to see the United States pursue an aggressive policy against the Soviet Union and its proxies even if it cost money. When Reagan took office, there was so much to do that most conservatives could agree that the internecine conflicts be subordinated. Taxes were cut, the military was strengthened, and the demand for new regulations was resisted. In time, however, the conflicts surfaced, and conservative politicians had to choose between competing conservative policies—between a balanced budget, lower taxes, and a strong defense.

Just as liberals had been unable to reconcile their desires with popular values and bureaucratic capacities, conservatives were unable to reconcile theirs with popular preferences and democratic requirements. The American people do not like liberal politicians, but they like liberal policies—federal spending on education, transportation, health, and the environment. In almost any election, the advantage will lie with whichever candidate promises to do more about these concerns.

Dionne's analysis is perceptive and evenhanded, but when it comes time for remedies he offers few persuasive alternatives to the positions now taken by rival political elites, and no mechanism whereby the influence of those elites on the selection of candidates or the promotion of policies can be reduced. Dionne joins the many voices calling for a revival of the "civic interest" or "civic virtue," by which he means that individual interest must be tempered by communal responsibilities. He illustrates that perspective by his suggestion that the deep public concern about schooling, housing, and economic growth might be met in ways that liberals and conservatives can both applaud, if the government employs strategies (vouchers, housing supplements, and enterprise zones) that empower individuals, decentralize decision-making, and create incentives. By the same token, the plight of the poor (a liberal concern) and the need for self-reliance (a conservative concern) can be fused by linking welfare to a work requirement. In these respects, Dionne aligns himself with Republicans such as Jack Kemp and Jim Pinkerton and with Democrats such as William Galston, Christopher Jencks, and Robert Shapiro. (I agree with much of this.) With them, he believes that there is a popular center in American politics that can be reached and built upon if activists stop basing their appeals on what fellow activists will reward.

Perhaps. But it must trouble Dionne that few of his intellectual allies wield much influence in either party, at least with respect to what counts—nominat-

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ing candidates and shaping legislation. For many years Democratic and Republican candidates for president have had to pass certain litmus tests (say, on abortion and taxes) that significantly narrow the range of viable candidates. In debating policies on the issues that trouble people the most—crime, race, schooling, drugs—the significant interest groups remain, as they have long been, ideologically polarized activists whose ability to raise a budget and to mobilize volunteers seems directly proportional to how dramatically they can portray the "threat" and how stridently they can denounce their opponents. Dionne must hope that the Progressive Policy Institute, the Democratic Leadership Conference, and the Kemp wing of the Republican Party can somehow become a match for the ACLU, the National Rifle Association, the Children's Defense Fund, and the National Education Association; but he gives us little reason to share his hope.

Let me offer a slightly different explanation for the decline in popular confidence in government, an explanation that Dionne himself suggests toward the end of his book. People give up on government when government announces that it will solve an important problem and then fails. Before the 1960s the federal government played almost no role in abortion, education, crime control, race relations, or health care. The few things the government did, it did very well. It ended (by the accident of World War II) the Depression, it won a popular war, it built the interstate highway system, and it provided retirement benefits for the elderly. Small wonder that Americans took pride in their government in the 1940s and 1950s.

But improving race relations, regulating abortions, reducing crime, and delivering good health care at a reasonable price are far more difficult tasks, especially because some of these were created by judges unconcerned about the impact of their decisions on public support for government. Once the government was embarked on them, failures, shortcomings, and frustrations were inevitable. Special-interest groups proliferated as the government took on more tasks, and they contributed to rigidities, complexities, and delays in the management of those tasks. Ideological elites who once argued over whether the government should do something at all now argued over how it should be done. And the intellectual skills that stood them in good stead in debating the need for a course of action stood them in poor stead in discussing the practical details of that course of action. (To make matters worse, the government in 1963 failed to do one very important thing: keep its president from being murdered.)

Dionne's argument, then, can be stood on its head. It is not that liberals and conservatives have disgusted the public by framing political issues as a series of false, ideologically extreme choices. It is that government, having embarked on policies that inevitably raise the most profound philosophical issues, has necessarily called forth an intense ideological debate over the ends sought and the means deployed.

Americans still have more confidence in their leaders than is the case with the peoples of almost any other democratic nation. The bewildering, personalistic, and adversarial quality of American politics is different, of course, from what is found in much of Europe, a fact that reflects the combined impact of mass higher education (which has supplied us with a much larger chattering class), a weak party system (which has made politics so entrepreneurial), and the separation of powers (which has provided so many opportunities for interest-group participation). Still, Americans have shifted toward a more European view, which is to say, a more cynical view, of such matters. We are less optimistic and less trusting than we once were. And rightly so: if Washington says that we should trust it to educate our children, to protect our environment, and to regulate our economy, we would be foolish not to be cautious and skeptical.

If history is any guide, Americans will take pride in their government not when people with advanced degrees start writing more moderate articles or when the Democrats figure out how to nominate a centrist candidate for president, but when the government takes on an important job and does it right. Operation Desert Storm is a powerful example: when it succeeded, the chatterers were either struck dumb or disproved by events, and the ideological debates over the size and purpose of the military were shoved aside.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of tasks that no one, least of all the government, knows how to do right. Still, there are some tasks that are in principle amenable to concerted action. Suppose the government were to say, "We don't care what it takes, we're going to get the homeless off the streets by providing institutional care for some, housing others, and jailing still others. It is a disgrace that they are there when it is totally unnecessary. General Schwarzkopf, or someone like him, will be put in charge." Various elites, from left to right, would go into a snit; but if it worked, and worked without doing any serious injustices, the people would gratefully say that "it's about time."

Or gang shootings in poor neighborhoods: we do know, after all, how to disarm people. We did it with tens of thousands of Iraqi POWs, and we do it everyday at American airports. It does not require waiting periods to buy guns (which I favor, but without much optimism), harassing gun dealers, or complicated registration forms. It requires that neighborhoods or housing projects that are now free-fire zones be converted into no-fire zones. You establish a perimeter around the area and you refuse to let anyone enter or leave or move about in it who is carrying a weapon without a lawful permit. The searches can be nonintrusive (they can be electronic); and the guns can be "arrested" without even arresting the people. The ACLU and the NRA would find common cause at last, united in opposition to this. But if it worked, even in a few places, the people would say that "it's about time."

There are many things that are uncertain or even just plain wrong with these proposals. Yet consider the alternative: to restore popular faith in government by re-educating college graduates, persuading people to abandon or moderate deeply held convictions, talking congressmen into becoming more deliberative and collegial, inducing Republicans to share the Democrats' enthusiasm for full-time political careers, taking abortion off the public agenda, and making blacks and whites trust each other.

Dionne makes my point without my examples. "To restore popular faith in the possibilities of government," he writes, "government must be shown to work." That means reducing the stifling array of constraints that prevent anybody from doing anything. For we have brought to perfection a political process that can always say "no" at the expense of one that can ever say "yes." Dionne's history of the ideological wars reminds us of where those constraints came from, and Ehrenhalt's account of political recruitment shows us why elected officials have incentives to multiply those constraints. The next book we need—and need badly—is one that tells us in some detail how to get out from under the crushing load of rules, set-asides, hearings, certificates, concurrences, impact studies, and procurement requirements that keeps our government big without letting it be effective.

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The Fog of History

By Andrew Delbanco

Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations) by Simon Schama

(Knopf, 333 pp., $21)

Simon Schama has become one of the very few contemporary historians who are read as much for themselves as for their subjects. In quick succession he has published two books, *The Embarrassment of Riches* (a study of "the moral ambiguity of good fortune" in Dutch culture of the seventeenth century) and *Citizens* (which he calls a "chronicle" of the French Revolution), to popular as well as critical acclaim. They are long books, written in a prose that is both an efficient engine of narration and a medium for self-reflection. Schama likes to pause to make analogical connections, and he writes with a wicked wit: it was, we learn in *Dead Certainties*, Harvard's President Walker, "arthritic and stone deaf" by the end of his tenure, who "established music in the college curriculum."

Seventeenth-century Dutch publishers, Schama tells us in *The Embarrassment of Riches*, were "entrepreneurs of armchair calamity" who churned out books on providential disasters for a public hungry to know that God cared enough to punish them. In his new book, Schama remarks that in New England, where public submission to the punitive wrath of God also has a venerable tradition, certain spectacular crimes (including the recent Stuart murder case) have been followed by "Calvinist soundbites"—exhortations to collective soul-searching from politicians and pundits who find general moral rot beneath incidental events. These phrases are the inventions of a serious but puckish writer who lifts us out of his narrative whenever he wants to connect it to contemporary ti, es, and then returns us undistracted to the immersion in the past.

Much shorter than its predecessors, *Dead Certainties* consists of two loosely related stories of death in North America—one from the eighteenth century, one from the nineteenth—and the Schama style is in high gear. The first story is concerned with the battlefield death of James Wolfe, British commander in the North American campaign of the Seven Years' War; the second with the murder ninety years later of a Harvard Medical School professor, George Parkman. Wolfe's death became the subject of a famous painting by Benjamin West, an eighteenth-century American artist who both scandalized and titillated his English patrons by defying the rules laid down by the Royal Academy for proper history-painting. He presented the dying Wolfe in disheveled contemporary dress—a violation of the convention that heroic figures must appear in classical costume—and placed a mostly naked Indian a few feet away. He filled the far background with images of the Royal Navy as the ultimate projector of British power, the middle distance with battle scenes leading up to the fatal encounter, and the foreground with officers bent in prayer. West's painting became a tableau of universal history built around Wolfe's transfiguration, or, in Schama's words, a "secular passion scene." A century later Wolfe's sacrifice became the subject of what is perhaps the greatest historical work ever composed in North America—Francis Parkman's account, in *Montcalm and Wolfe*, of the imperial death struggle between France and England for control of the continental interior.

Schama's second subject—the sordid murder of George Parkman, uncle of the historian—was an event out of which grand history has never been composed in words or paint. Following Parkman's disappearance on a November afternoon in 1849, shortly after he had been seen chatting on Washington Street in Boston, posters offering a reward for clues to his fate went up all around the city. A few days later body parts were discovered by a suspicious janitor whose apartment adjoined the laboratory of John Webster, the Erving Professor of Chemistry at Harvard, whom Parkman had been hounding for an unpaid debt.

During the subsequent trial, the triumphant janitor, Ephraim Littlefield (one of Schama's best-drawn characters), disavowed any claim to the reward and explained, in a nasty bit of character illumination, that he had decided that something was amiss when the usually stingy Webster presented him with a Thanksgiving turkey. While his wife roasted and basted the bird, Littlefield followed his hunch and dropped into the professor's lab through an open window. He returned to his wife convinced that there had been foul play in the basement. After dinner, from a crawl space beneath the professor's privy, he broke through the brick wall and found bone, bits of flesh, and an entire pelvis "with the doings all hanging down from it."

Subsequently Parkman's dentist identified the charred dentures pulled from the corpse as the same porcelain-and-wood contraption that he had installed a month before in the doctor's jaw, though a rival dentist called by the defense dismissed the suggestion that there was anything distinctive about it. Parkman's brother-in-law countered that the thickly haired torso found putrefying in Webster's tea chest was the same he had seen when the doctor had pulled up his shirt to boast how little he needed to wear in the cold. The defense never conceded that the victim's body had been found, and discrepancies remained between Parkman's height and the size of the reconstructed skeleton.

Webster, whose good character was attested to by a parade of Brahmins that included Jared Sparks and Oliver Wendell Holmes, and who maintained his innocence throughout the trial (which was attended in ten-minute shifts by nearly 60,000 persons), was convicted after short deliberation by the jury. He had speculated to his lawyers that Littlefield himself, who was practiced at obtaining cadavers for medical students, had planted the incriminating corpse on his premises, and had chosen a close fit for the missing doctor. But the story that eventually prevailed was that Webster, in a rage at his creditor's implacability, had struck Parkman with a piece of stove wood and—either to secure his victory or, in the more generous version of the story, in a gruesome panic—had sliced him up with a dissector's skill and then, with less skill, burned the remains.

Justice Lemuel Shaw charged the jury for nearly three hours, elaborating the niceties of what constitutes malice aforethought, and giving a strangely impassioned endorsement of the legality of conviction based on circumstantial evidence. After the trial Webster broke down and confessed, pleading for clemency from the governor. Much of the national press sided with him, and, ac-

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cusing Shaw of "judicial murder," protested that he had goaded the jury to convict. Pains were taken to keep the exact date of execution from Webster's family, who believed him innocent until the end.

Schama tells both stories with gusto (especially the grisly second one), but he only hints at their connections beyond the Parkman genealogy, and there are aspects, such as the public outcry after Webster's conviction, that he treats only glancingly. This is a book, he says, concerned with "the teasing gap separating a lived event and its subsequent narration." Written as if to invite us into the blank space between events and the many ways in which they can be reimagined, *Dead Certainties* oscillates between the first-person voices of participants and an informal third-person historical commentary on the limitations of their, and our, awareness. It is a kind of ciphered postscript to the big books that preceded it.

I say this because its real subject is not the imperial conflict of which Wolfe's death was the culminating symbol, or the shock to New England civility entailed by the violent death of one Harvard man at the hands of another. Such subjects might lend themselves to extended narration or analysis as in Schama's previous work, but what we have here is entirely different. After two strongly interpretive books (*Citizens* came in for some harsh attacks on its sympathy for the brutalized aristocracy), Schama seems to want to leave the elements of his new book deliberately unintegrated. His point, as his title announces, is to kill all putative certainties by breaking off each part of the story just as it threatens to build enough pace to overwhelm alternative lines of narration. It is as if he is making a retrospective apology—in the justifying, not the self-repudiating, sense—for the masterful narratives he previously composed.

As all good writing does, Schama's carries a certain inherent claim to authority, and the present book, without resorting to a merely fashionable relativism, is a kind of disclaimer of such authority. It is a pastiche of competitive, and in some instances contradictory, monologues drawn from letters, legal transcripts, diary entries, and newspaper reports by participants and observers separated from one another by caste and prejudice and experience. Schama wants this book to feel open and unresolved, more like messy experience than like rationalized history.

The result for the reader is vertigo of the pleasurable sort delivered by a virtuoso performance. Schama signals this objective from the beginning, with an entirely imagined account of a British infantryman clawing his way up a cliff as, by night, Wolfe's army makes its desperate move to cut off the French supply lines from the west. We "feel the scare of the battle crawling through his uniform," and each pelting "shower of sort dirt" adds to his fear of being beaten by his own officers if he falters. Although the rest of the Wolfe section is more documented than imagined, the opening sets the tone.

Schama writes almost always from inside the tightly circumscribed consciousness of some individual actor within the swirl of events, and the dominant mode of the writing, first-person or third-person, is speculative. We enter into the mind of a British soldier who hears Wolfe gurgle thanks to God for the victory as blood oozes from his abdominal wound; or into the mind of the general himself, whose body is failing under involuntary sieges of diarrhea and voluntary bloodlettings; or into the bitterness of the woman to whom he is engaged, who writes to his mother (who she knows disapproved of her) asking for any token or message he may have sent to her among his private effects. Finally, we are brought into intimacy with Francis Parkman, who, more than 100 years after the event, shields his failing eyes from the pain of sunlight by drawing drapes across his Beacon Hill window, and devises a bizarre mechanism of wire and wood to guide his hand across the paper so that he can write the story of Wolfe's heroism without straining to see what he has written.

Schama's prose is evocative and immediate. We hear the "fractured Boston Irish French" in which Francis Parkman's hired girl reads to him; and we smell the putrid sweetness of George Parkman's corpse as the lid of Webster's tea chest is pried open. Sometimes the writing relaxes too much and relies on its own momentum. I am not sure that a prison cell can "smell of dust and despair"; and sometimes the technique of interior monologue becomes more predictable than revealing. But in general this is distinguished prose, and what makes it interesting is the way that it resists itself at the same time as it propels its stories forward. Schama interrupts himself continually—by reminding us, for instance, that the apocryphal tale of Wolfe reciting Gray's *Elegy* to his troops before the fatal battle might well be true, or by interjecting an archly professorial question ("Was this not admirable, Michel Foucault?") into his report that the young Dr. Parkman studied under a French neurologist who freed the insane from their shackles in the Salpêtrière.

These are calculated interruptions timed to break the spell of the tale, and to wrench us back to the candid idiosyncrasies of the teller. In these ways each story, just as it seems to be settling into some analytic structure, is made to swerve away. There are hints that the guilty verdict of the Webster-Parkman case is to be understood as an act of class resentment (the jury was all blue collar, the defense witnesses mostly starched Harvard men); or that it was somehow a geographical contest between "the reptiles of the [Boston] penny-press" and the prudent men of Cambridge. But these sorts of arguments, usually the ponderous stuff of academic historiography, are never allowed to generate a context of their own. There are really no "conclusions" in this book, only a few peppery suggestions of how one might, if one wished, make personal sense out of the chaotic phenomena it reports.

It is in the afterword, where Schama speaks of "the metaphysical mystery" by which the past becomes present, that he lays his cards on the table:

> Without this convenient epiphany, historians are left forever chasing shadows, painfully aware of their inability ever to reconstruct a dead world in its completeness, however thorough or revealing their documentation. Of course, they make do with other work: the business of formulating problems, of supplying explanations about cause and effect. But the certainty of such answers always remains contingent on their unavoidable remoteness from their subjects. We are doomed to be forever hailing someone who has just gone around the corner and out of earshot.

Portrayal

Hearing about a friend's friend over years,
not meeting that person perhaps for years,
then only at a social occasion
where both of you awkwardly need to shun
the intimacies you've near-feasted on,
is like the view from still lifes hung
on opposite sides of a gallery wall:
she the rabbit carcass strung upside down,
surrounded by cherries, lemons, and bowls;
you the trout splayed on blue and white towels
with grapes and eggs. Both of you are painted
by your friend's art, your connection created
by your own secrets inside the framed
flay which resembles you, beside her name.

Molly Peacock

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It is the virtue of Schama's book that it seems with so much imaginative life as to waken us to stories he does not tell. Literary scholars, for instance, have recently raised the tantalizing possibility that the Webster-Parkman murder case may have figured in the imagination of Herman Melville, whose father-in-law was the stern presiding judge, and who wrote, forty years later in *Billy Budd*, a tale of a sudden deathblow delivered out of one man's inexpressible horror at the cruelty of another. More than likely we will never know if this imaginative appropriation, without which our culture would be inestimably diminished, was one more accidental consequence of the quarrel between two Harvard scientists in a Boston cellar. But the wild improbability—more significant for Schama, the essential unknowability—of such a connection is, I think, what he wants us to feel history is about. In his hands the past loses its remoteness and takes on the noise and clutter of experience—a transformation performed by a magician confident enough to remind us before, during, and after the performance that it is all an illusion.

ANDREW DELBANCO is the author of *The Puritan Ordeal*, recently published in paperback by Harvard University Press.

Cape Hell

BY GARY KRIST

Resuscitation of a Hanged Man by Denis Johnson

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 257 pp., $19.95)

"Hell," my Lutheran pastor used to teach in confirmation class, "might be something like Heaven—an eternity in God's presence. But in Hell His face is turned away." In four novels over the past eight years, Denis Johnson has shown himself to be a diligent geographer of just this kind of hell. His characters, strung-out and usually desperate, dwell in a perpetual state of spoiled grace, locked out of a rapture that they can dimly sense but never achieve without losing their sanity. Suffering keenly, scrabbling for redemption, they play out what has become the organizing myth of Johnson's fiction: the descent into the underworld, followed by a resurrection that is bankrupt, compromised, or just plain delusionary. It is the old myth of apotheosis, but subverted—or brought up to date.

In *Angels*, his first novel, Johnson presented his most immediately recognizable depiction of the God-forsaken underworld. The book's protagonists—Jamie, a runaway young mother, and Bill, a thrice-divorced ex-con—wandered through a darkly poeticized version of the wrong side of the tracks, a metaphorical rubble of bus stations, cheap motels, and, ultimately, prisons and mental institutions. The rubble became literal in his second novel: hell in *Fiskadoro* was a post-Armageddon wasteland—Key West after the nuclear holocaust—where the only route to salvation turned out to be the annihilation of memory. And in *The Stars at Noon*, a kind of surrealist farce (and the closest thing to a comedy Johnson has written), hell was Nicaragua in 1984, an atmosphere so compromised by corruption and moral confusion that any attempt to perform a decent, honest act was rendered futile.

With these three novels, Johnson established himself as one of the most serious and provocative writers of his generation. Not only were the books written in a vivid, almost hallucinatory style that was in itself a substantial achievement, they were also ambitious. Unlike many writers his age, Johnson was not content merely to present a depraved world, call it America, and wait for the royalty checks to roll in. His early work, *Fiskadoro* in particular, went beyond that kind of static revelation, manifesting a keen interest in how the religious impulse—the human inclination toward transcendence—operates in such a context of spiritual catastrophe.

These implied religious concerns have become explicit in his latest book. *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* begins by mapping out another of Johnson's hells, but this one, the seaside resort of Provincetown, Massachusetts, during the off-season, is perhaps his oddest, most idiosyncratic version so far. Johnson is probably aware that this particular choice of hell may at first glance seem too heavily ironic and perhaps slightly homophobic (given the demographics of the town), but what interests him about Provincetown is its quality of social and sexual indefiniteness. As he depicts it, Provincetown, "the last town in America" and "the end of the line," is a fundamentally bewildering place where all manner of distinctions break down—where men dress as women, women as men, and everyone seems to have two or three unrelated part-time jobs, eluding definition at every turn. Lacking any clear and harmonious chain of being, Provincetown is emphatically not the City of God.

Into this setting Johnson introduces a character for whom such an atmosphere of doubt can only lead to trouble—an impressionable, deeply disturbed young man with a sharp need for spiritual certainty. Leonard English, a 34-year-old orphan from Lawrence, Kansas, arrives on the peninsula one night in the reckless, violent style that has become trademark for this author. Having stopped for a few drinks in a town along the road (its hopelessness beautifully and efficiently suggested by images of empty shopping centers and boarded-up seafood stands), English drinks himself numb and proceeds to smash his Volkswagen into a traffic island on a lonely stretch of highway. A local cabdriver appears at his bloody shoulder and tells him, perhaps too prophetically: "You made a wrong turn." Neither English nor the reader will ever think of disputing this.

In the course of the book's first section, Johnson reveals his protagonist's twofold purpose in coming to the Cape. English is here to start one of those hybrid Provincetown jobs as a radio announcer cum private investigator, but also, more important, to recover from a botched suicide attempt. In a moment of weakness, it seems, English once tried to hang himself, for reasons that he can't seem to articulate or even understand. He is a Catholic, but a Catholic in crisis, unable to make the cleansing confession that would free him of his sin. So he is floundering, as all of Johnson's ingenues flounder, in God's shadow, just out of sight of the countenance he aches to see but cannot find:

> [English] didn't pray anymore for faith, because he'd found that a growing certainty of the Presence was accompanied by a terrifying absence of any sign or feeling or manifestation of it. He was afraid that what he prayed to was nothing, only this limitless absence. I'll grow until I've found you, and you won't be there.

To speak of English as an ingenue may strike some readers as rather ingenuous in itself. The character does, after all, drink himself into a stupor at every opportunity, and he's not above smashing windows, stealing passports, and committing the occasional illegal entry. But English is a spiritual innocent, ripe for manipulation by the outside world. He

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possesses a type of consciousness that has become alarmingly common in recent fiction—a mind of confused impressions and inarticulate needs, subject to the exigencies of the moment (or, as Johnson puts it, "a brain where everything fizzes and nothing connects"). This particular kind of character is all too often used as an author's crutch, a facile symbol of an incoherent world, but Johnson finds in English's fizzing brain the perfect laboratory for the kind of experiment he wants to conduct. The important difference between English and the garden-variety zoned-out cipher is that English's inability to connect is accompanied by an almost unbearably intense need to connect. It is a religious impulse turned pathological. And it is what ultimately turns English into a monster.

Johnson is able to push his character's ominously suggestible mind to extremes by throwing English headlong into the nebulous complexities of Provincetown. During his first weeks in town, English falls in with a series of acquaintances—a morally dubious employer named Ray Sands, a cabdriver who subscribes to theories of extraterrestrial interference, a burned-out alcoholic radio announcer—who only intensify his feelings of confusion and doubt. Even more disorienting is his romance with Leanna Sousa, an attractive lesbian whom he meets in church on his first day in Provincetown. English becomes infatuated with her, and Leanna, surprisingly (and not quite credibly), encourages his attentions, at the same time distancing him by carrying on an affair with another woman.

The scenes between English and Leanna—ambiguous, offbeat, sometimes infuriating, and often strangely exhilarating—are typical of the book's peculiar sensibility, perhaps best described as a sort of post-"Twin Peaks" semicomic absurdity. Johnson's aim is to suggest the chaotic muddle into which English has wandered, and in that he succeeds. The danger he faces in depicting such arbitrary and gratuitous oddness, however, is to seem arbitrarily and gratuitously odd himself. It's a familiar pitfall in a certain strain of contemporary fiction, with its fashionably bizarre characters whose actions seem motivated primarily by a desire to reveal the eccentric and subversive genius of their creators. But Johnson is after something more interesting than the revelation of the alleged dark corruption at the heart of the American psyche. He uses the absurdity and the corruption as a starting point, not as ends in themselves, wishing instead to probe his character's efforts to engage the chaos and force it into some kind of meaning.

Frustrated by the absence of any tangible signs of God's reclamation of him, English becomes more and more desperate as the book progresses. Two crucial events push him over the edge of mere depression into a kind of psychosis—witnessing Ray Sands's freak and fatal heart attack (the most terrifying scene in the book), and being kidnapped one night (apparently by mistake), interrogated, beaten, and left on the street to bleed. These galvanizing events have the effect of undermining the last remnants of English's already shaky sense of reality. He begins to believe that his torment is God's way of preparing him for something, the purpose he is yearning for: "Right now he almost had the power to say that he'd really killed himself. That his life on earth had stopped and then started somewhere else—here, now. That he'd hung himself, died, and been brought here to wait for God's word. God's charge, the task that would bring Lenny English back from the dark."

English begins to sense in the white noise around him subtle hints of a conspiracy, a plot centering around something called the Truth Infantry, an obscure paramilitary organization of which his late boss was apparently the head. This conspiracy, he decides, is the medium by which God is sending his message. Johnson skillfully suggests that all of the seemingly related events—the kidnapping, the disappearance of a young man named Gerald Twinbrook, the secret and vaguely sinister friendship of Ray Sands and the local bishop—may actually be unrelated, coincidental, threaded into coherence by a mind needy for meaning. But English experiences an almost physical compulsion to find his mission in these loose ends. And when the voice in his head (his inner rebop, he calls it) begins to assume the shape of a terrible command, English is forced to enter into some dangerous speculation:

> What if a person heeded all such inner rebop, would he be damned or saved? How quickly would a person's life progress along its lines if he followed every impulse as if it started from God? How much more quickly would he be healed? Or how much faster destroyed? Saints had done that. Also mass killers, and wreakers of a more secret mayhem, witches and cultists and vampires. . . .

The mention of saints, cultists, and mass killers in the same breath broaches a central preoccupation of the novel. Johnson (like Thomas Pynchon, a writer whose influence is evident throughout) is troubled by the slender boundary separating paranoia and a belief in any kind of mission or purpose—or, for that matter, a belief in any external meaning whatsoever. The discernment of meaning, of course, is a selection process. We select certain elements from our perceptions and define them as significant, as an expression of coherent intention. But what governs this selection in a context of chaos, where no self-evident hierarchy of experience exists? And what makes one selection a delusion and the other an inspiration? Simone Weil, who is alluded to frequently throughout the book, interpreted her message as an injunction to starve herself to death, in response to the deaths of millions of people in Hitler's camps. Was this a similar delusion? If it was not, what made it something more?

These are the questions that English asks himself once he becomes firmly convinced that there is indeed a web—a many-tentacled conspiracy—at the center of which lies Andrew, the bishop. English, his brain making connections at last, decides that the bishop is the drag on that he, the self-professed knight of faith, must slay. That is the act of faith that will turn God's face back to him. He still has enough of his wits to recognize this act as insane, but would God ask him to do anything sane? "Did He come to Elijah and say, Go, secure a respectable position and wear out your days in the chores of it?" If the task were easy to justify, he reasons, it wouldn't require the defining leap of faith.

Johnson has successfully woven the thread of suspense through his novel, and I don't want to give away the ending. Suffice it to say that English ultimately decides to heed his inner rebop. The book closes with the most disturbing of Johnson's nightmare apotheoses: sleepless, dressed in a mélange of men's and women's clothing, and armed with a stolen gun, English steers a leaky boat toward the figure of the bishop on the Provincetown pier. And in answering what he believes to be God's call, he transforms himself into an utterly new kind of creature: a knight of faith after all, a saint for the new millennium in America.

Clearly, nobody will ever accuse Denis Johnson of lacking brashness. If there are moments, as I've suggested, when he skates along the edge of some major problems, that's no surprise, given the leaps he is interested in making. By obscuring the line between religion and psychosis in an atmosphere of chaos, *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* raises large doubts about the possibility of faith in any world like our own, where "there [is] no telling the difference between up and down, wrong and right, between sex and love, men and women, even between the living and the dead." My old pastor would probably be appalled.

GARY KRIST is the author of *The Garden State* (Vintage Contemporaries) and is currently at work on a novel.

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NEW YORK DIARIST

Two cities

A YOUNG FRIEND ASKED ME RECENTLY what it's like to live in the city where I grew up. The question startled me. I never think of New York that way. True, when I walk along certain streets, I remember things that happened there, but the same city?

WHEN I WENT TO GRAMMAR school in the mid-1920s on 63rd Street between Second and Third Avenues—now a chic residential neighborhood bristling with high apartment houses—I passed a blacksmith shop on the way from the corner to the middle of the block. I can still hear the hiss of the white-hot horseshoes being plunged into a bucket of water, can still sniff the burny smell of the hoof to which a warm shoe was fixed. I used to hitch rides to and from school on the back step of horse-drawn ice wagons. I used to go shopping with my mother in the pushcart market that lined both sides of Second Avenue from 70th Street to 76th. Those pushcarts were under the Second Avenue El. We lived on 68th Street near the corner of Second, and if one of us was on the phone when an El train came along, we had to halt the conversation until it passed. (Other boroughs still have Els, but people under 50 can't imagine one in mid-Manhattan.)

IN THOSE 1920S, NEAR THE END OF the great immigration wave, my schoolmates were mostly Italian Catholic and Eastern European Jewish, the children of foreign-born parents or foreign-born themselves. Both of my parents had been born in New York, as had both of my grandmothers. My schoolmates called me, semi-derisively, "the Yankee." Once a teacher asked me to carry a note to the principal. In his outer office, an Italian woman, mother of one of the students, was waiting to see him. While waiting, she was unembarrassedly nursing a baby. I remember a blue vein in her very white breast.

RADIO WAS STILL NEW IN THOSE days, wondrous. Many of my schoolmates came from families too poor to own a set. I became something of a school celebrity because of radio and my father. He was a dentist, and in the professional society to which he belonged, he was in charge of a series of talks on dental hygiene that the society presented on the municipal radio station WNYC—fifteen minutes at midday once a week. Usually he invited other dentists to speak, but one week he did the talk himself. My mother wrote a note to my teacher asking that I be excused a half-hour before lunchtime that day, so that I could come home and hear my father. It was granted. I heard him, and I bragged. Some of my friends, especially the foreign-born ones, could hardly believe it. They actually knew someone whose father's voice had been broadcast all around New York City. One of them, probably quoting a parent, said, "Only in America."

EARLIER, UNTIL I WAS 7 YEARS old, we lived in Washington Heights, near the northern tip of Manhattan. A photographer used to come around with a pony on which children would sit to have their pictures taken. I still have mine taken at 4. (My future wife, then unknown to me, had her picture taken on the same pony a few years later.) In the summer, a truck came around with a small carousel on the back. The driver turned the carousel by hand. There was a big iron wheel at the side, and he pumped up and down while six or eight children rode around. I loved it. (My wife, a few years later, loved it too.) A man occasionally wandered through the streets, garments draped over his shoulder, calling out, "I cash clo'. I cash clo'." He bought old clothes, usually men's, that people wanted to get rid of, and then sold them somewhere. Opposite our apartment house was a large vacant lot that had never been built on. It was surrounded by apartment houses, but the lot itself was untouched. I used to clamber over rocks and climb trees that Indians had known. This was true of Central Park, too, I knew, but that was for the city. This was for me and my friends, our own Indian territory.

I DON'T LIVE IN THAT CITY ANYmore.

IS NEW YORK WORSE NOW? OF course, and not just because many of my mementos are gone. We have an average of six murders a day, often including children. We have tens of thousands of homeless men and women, some of them mentally incompetent. We have a horrific drug problem. We share those miseries with other cities; one title we hold alone. New York streets are dirtier than those in any American city I've seen (let alone London or Paris).

BUT THE GREATEST SINGLE change in New York in my lifetime is in the view of equality. Blacks are no longer required to "know their place"—at any rate, not comparably with the rigors of the past. At least lip service is now paid to the idea of absolute equality. ("Assume a virtue, if you have it not," says Hamlet.) After World War II, Puerto Ricans flocked to New York. Soon came other Hispanics. Equality for them, too. The cash machine in my bank now asks, after I've inserted my card, whether I want my instructions in English or in Spanish. New York has become, perhaps less willy than nilly, a gigantic testing ground for the idea that America has been mouthing for 200 years. This, too, is true of other American cities, but New York is the hugest crucible. Insofar as inherited hates and prejudices—in *all* of us—will permit, we are finding out whether equality can be more than a catchword, whether equality is possible in race, religion, sexual preference, gender. (Female police officers, for example. Fully uniformed and packing pistols, they still avoid eye contact with a passing man, just like other women.) New York is at the head of the parade that is being asked to put its money where its Fourth-of-July mouth is.

THE PROCESS IS EXPENSIVE. IT costs everybody something. It abrades those who grew up in a stratified New York. It harries those, particularly black or Hispanic, who are on the frontier and must bear both the resentments in others and the frustrations in themselves. Surely crime rates and drug abuse are connected to the tauntings of unfulfilled equality. Surely the decline in civic pride is connected to those same frustrations.

"SUPERB-FACED MANHATTAN!" sang Whitman. "Comrade Americanos! to us, then at last the Orient comes." Was he foreseeing sushi bars, Korean grocers and nail shops? Walt continued:

> To us, my city,
> Where our tall-topt marble and iron
> beauties range on opposite sides, to walk
> in the space between,
> To-day our Antipodes comes.

Will the vast experiment succeed? I'll never know; but the fact that it is happening helps to reconcile me to this dirty and dangerous city, this second New York of my life.

STANLEY KAUFFMANN

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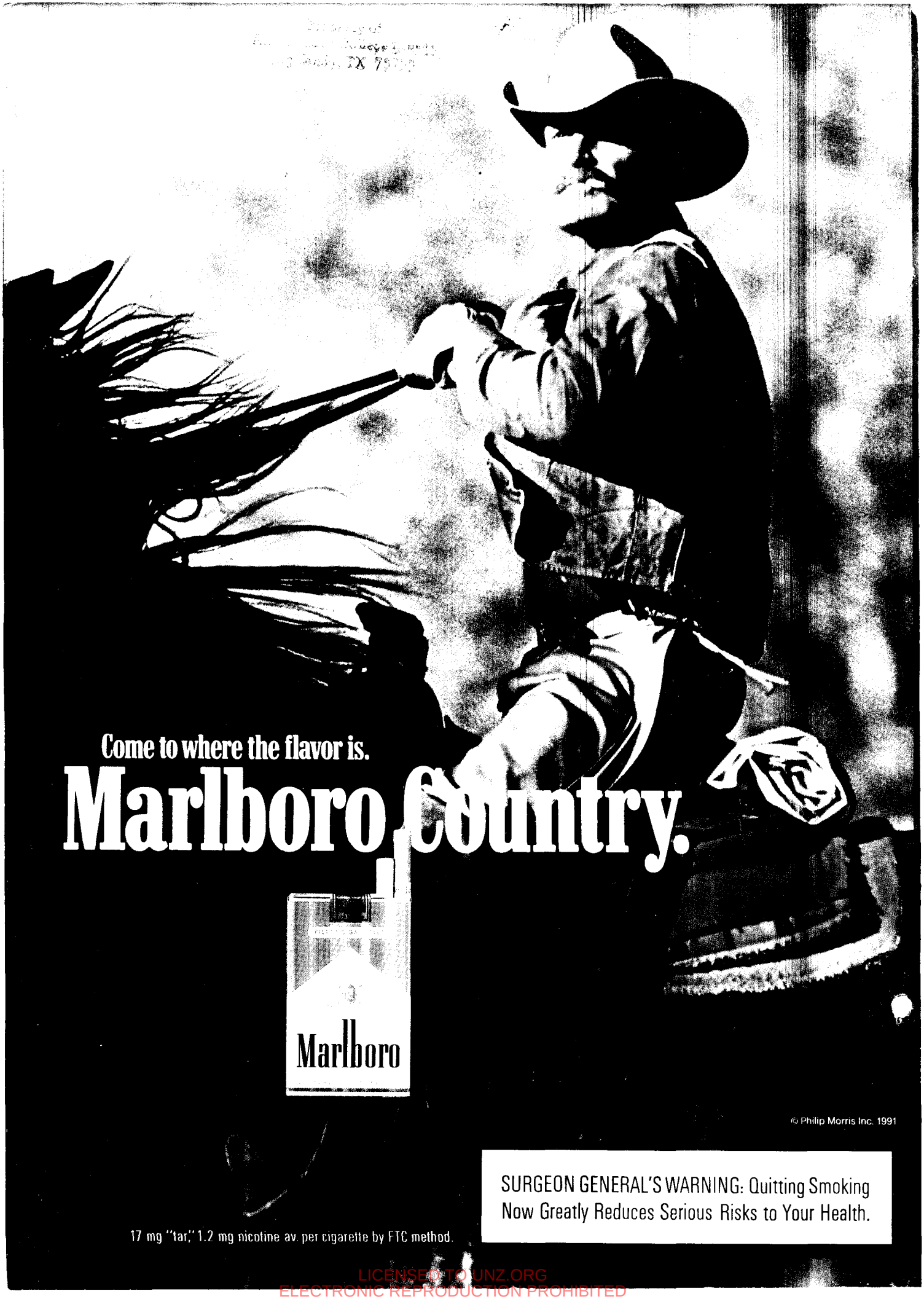

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17 mg "tar," 1.2 mg nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method.

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